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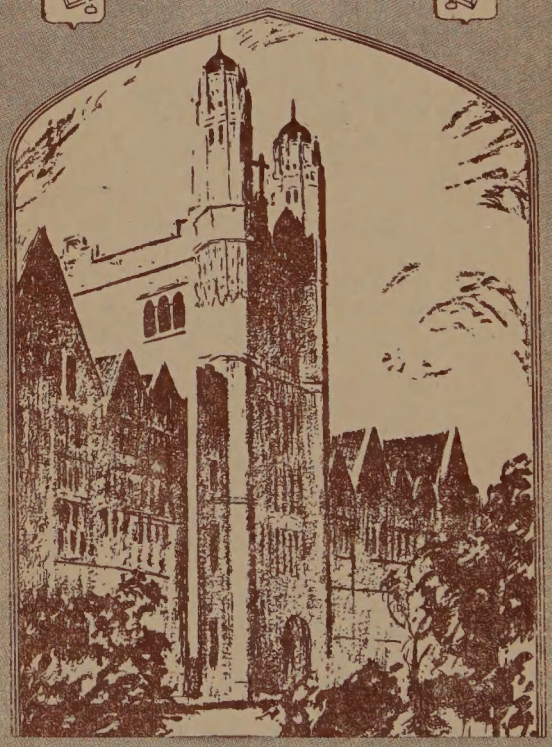

Christmas 1898

Presented by Uncle Charlie

Ruby Moss Lynch

MY LADY

MY LADY

A STORY OF LONG AGO

BY

MARGUERITE BOUVET

AUTHOR OF "SWEET WILLIAM," "LITTLE MARJORIE'S LOVE STORY," "PRINCE TIP-TOP," ETC.

Illustrated by

HELEN MAITLAND ARMSTRONG

CHICAGO

A. C. McCLURG AND COMPANY

1894

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My
AMOR VINCIT OMNIA

MY LADY

By

Marguerite Bouvet

Illustrated by

Helen Maitland Armstrong

CHICAGO

A·C·McCLURG & Co

M·D·CCCXCIV

TO THEE,

O FAIR PROVENCE!

AND

TO THE DEAR COMPANION WHO SHARED WITH ME
THE JOYS OF THY PERPETUAL SPRINGTIME,

THESE PAGES

ARE LOVINGLY INSCRIBED.

AVIGNON, November 31, 1893.

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CHAPTER I.

PERHAPS I am old to be telling you a tale of young loves, now that my eyes are growing dim, and my hair is streaked with silver; old, you may say, to be discoursing upon matters so far removed from my years, — too old to be talking of my own foolish heart by the wayside, as I fear I may, in the telling of my narrative. But let me say to you now, for the sake of your indul-

gence, that it is not my story I would relate in these pages, — though a story of my own I have, as what woman, indeed, has not, — but the story of those who are dearer to me than self. For what has an old woman like me to do with romancing, forsooth! if she but tell her own silly love-tale, and that near a half-century old, and all out of the fashion!

My Lady is now one-and-twenty, and I am thrice her age; and yet since her own love-times are come, and I have had such a deal to do in the matter, there is a sweet fellowship between us, such as only confidences bring, and which might well exist between sisters; whereas we are but young mistress and old nurse. We have pondered over many tender things together, she and I, and we have laughed and wept together; for now her heart is drawn, I think, to every thing and creature that has known trouble. She often tells me that my heart has not kept pace with my years, and that I understand love and loving so well that she would liefer tell her secrets to me than to any one else in the world. But that is her own fond way of talking to me. She knows that I love to live

in the long-ago, as all do who have crossed from the heyday of life to the twilight of age; and like the sweet creature that she is, she questions me and draws my thoughts from me, and would have me speak to her of the days that are dear to me. 'T is then I recall only the pleasant and happy times of my long life, — though the past holds some dark memories for me of which my dear girl knows nothing. But memory is such a gentle thing that it chooses rather the fair and lovely pages of life for our contemplation: its pains and sorrows being heavy must needs sink to the bottom; but its joys, so light and frothy, rise quickest and rest longest upon its surface. That is why, as I look, with my darling at my side, upon the years that are gone, I see only a calm and peaceful surface, with here and there a happy recollection floating like a flower upon its bosom; but when I think on those times alone, ah me, it is very different!

Now, I fear me I have made a bad beginning; for while I sit me down to write you my Maidie's story, this freaksome pen runs

away of its own fancy, and would tell you quite another tale.

You will guess, ere you have read many of these pages, that my Lady, and indeed her cousin Philippe, the present Marquis de Saint-Rambert, are the two beings that lie nearest my heart. My darling says that I must add a third person to this number, holding that I am bound in honor to love all whom she loves; but it is a hard lesson for my jealous old heart to learn to love so formidable a rival, especially as I am unable so soon to forget the stir and turmoil brought into our quiet midst by this same young person's handsome countenance.

Now, to tell you why I am thus bound in heart to two young creatures so far above me in station, being neither their grandam nor their grand-aunt, nor nearer to them in kin than yourself, I must needs make a long story of it, and take you back with me well-nigh five-and-twenty autumns past, to that gray Michaelmas morning when the Lady Margaret, my darling's young mother, first came to me and made me her confessor, as she said, and later did succeed in making me

her most wily accomplice by playing upon my heart-strings with her girlish grievances. We were then in the little town of Wolverton, — the homeliest and merriest little town, to my mind, in all of merry England. For it was there I had lived my childhood and maidenhood, and grown wise in many things; 't was there I learned the first joy that comes to woman — But enough! I may not dwell upon that now; there is a time and a place for all that I would say of happy days at Wolverton.

I had not yet dreamed of venturing across the waters to this fair land of France, being but a simple country wench, and never having journeyed so far from home as London town, yet ever hungering to do so for what I might learn of the great world beyond. I had been a yeoman's daughter and was still a yeoman's sister, and butter and eggs and cream had been and were like to be my lot forever; yet I had a mad thirst for all manner of things above my station.

Now, as Fate would have it, that same sweet cream and butter against which my lofty spirit so oft rebelled proved to be the

very things that brought to me what I desired most, since by means of them I made my first acquaintance with great folk. It was in a year of wondrous stir and excitement abroad, — though be it far from me to tell you what was the purport of it all, having affairs of my own to concern me in those days which had naught to do with the state of the French kingdom, — a year of revolution in this land where to-day I write these pages, that has not its like in history, when the very hair on people's heads turned white for fear, and every monarch trembled on his throne. Ah, well do I remember the time! The village-folk talked of nothing else, and our own England was mightily disturbed thereby. But there are days, and plenty of them, I would sooner recall than those days, the very thought of which is like a bad night-vision to one who lived through them as I did. I speak of them now only because it was in this wise that Monsieur le Marquis de Saint-Rambert and his young daughter, the Lady Margaret, happened in our little town of Wolverton. Monsieur le Marquis had sought refuge here for the sake of his only child, and,

too, because he himself had well-nigh outlived his days of warfare, though I doubt not that it grieved him bitterly to leave his dear country when she needed his help most, now that he was too old to do her service. So he had left the beautiful old château in Provence, with its wealth of roses and green gardens, its groves of olive-trees, its perpetual sunshine, and had come to live in Wolverton, at the Rookery, which was the country-house of one of our English gentlemen. It was a safe enough place in those days of trouble, and out of the world enough, Heaven knows! for Wolverton was but a country village, with simple-minded folk in it, who only opened wide their eyes and mouths at all they heard of the fierce doings of an enraged people, and then went their quiet ways and forgot about it as soon as they did the punishment in the next world, of which they heard much from their good parson.

It was here that Monsieur le Marquis and his daughter were living, I know not how long a time, when I first learned to know and love the Lady Margaret. Now, our farm was but a short walk from the Rookery, and

I was wont to take a basketful of dairies thither every evening at sun-down. It so happened that one day as I was turning on my way homeward, after leaving there my handsomest cakes of butter, I was arrested by a sound which, to my ear, was both food and music. From an opened window looking down upon the lane, there came a sweet low voice rising and falling in such rich cadence that I could not tell at first whether it was a song or a prayer. But I soon recognized the Lady Margaret's voice reading aloud to her father one of Robbie Burns's tender love-poems, while Monsieur le Marquis lay back in his chair fast asleep. Such wealth of sentiment, such tenderness of expression was in her voice, that I stood still awhile to listen, and trembled for very emotion. I waited till the song was done, and thought I heard a gentle sigh from the lips that read them; but mayhap it was an echo from my own heart, for I had not heard for many a day anything that so disturbed my peace as those yearning, passionate lines. However that may be, I was loath to leave the spot, when suddenly, and as though in response to my thoughts,

"A good-day to you, Mistress Anne."

the Lady Margaret herself appeared at the casement, and, seeing me, called out in her prettiest, —

"A good-day to you, Mistress Anne; and how do you find yourself to-day?"

"If you please, quite well, and many thanks to your sweet Ladyship," I replied.

"And have you brought us some fresh butter-cakes, good Anne?"

"As many as I could carry, sweet my Lady," I made answer. Then seeing by my eyes how much I did admire her, — for she was indeed the very loveliest picture I had ever seen, as she leaned over the green ivy that scrambled round the window-ledge, her bright curls tumbling in pretty disorder over her white gown, and her dark eyes swimming in a depth of fire that I could never fathom, —

"You are fond of me," she said, "are you not, Mistress Anne?"

"And sure, my Lady, how could one help it!" I said, blushing at her quick reading of my thoughts.

"And I like you very much, Mistress Anne," she continued, "and I should wish you to be my friend. I have great need of

a friend sometimes," and she lowered her voice a bit, "a woman-friend like you, for it is lonely here, and my dear father can think of nothing but the troubles in our country, and longs for the time to come when he may go back to France." Then, as if a sudden thought came to her, she said confidingly: "Will you walk awhile with me in the garden before you go? It is not late, and David will not need you yet, and I should like to talk with you."

Dear child that she was, Heaven bless her memory! how well I knew what she needed, without any words! How well I knew that I, though lowly born, had felt the self-same need and known the self-same hunger that her few words bespoke! I have never taken it in pride or vainglory that the Lady Margaret came to me with her confidences. 'T was rather the lack of one better that made her choose me to confide in, I fear, for she knew no one save myself who was near her in age, and even I was then ten years her elder. And Mistress Hyde, who had been her governess ever since their first coming to England, and who was a

woman of much learning, I doubt not, and had trained her young mind admirably, had never succeeded in winning her heart.

Now, Mistress Hyde was a dark-browed, severe woman, with a forbidding look about her that was enough to freeze the flow of sympathy from any source. No tender-hearted child like the Lady Margaret would ever have gone to her with any secret confidence. She was a woman, but without womanliness, and I knew the child was afraid of her and had no love for her. Her nature was hard and unfeeling, as one might have told at a glance from those close, crossed black eyes of hers; and even I could not bear to remain long in her company.

Therefore, not very many minutes after the Lady Margaret and I had walked about in the garden, we became, in truth, the fastest friends. Heaven forgive my pride for speaking of it! I told her of my listening to her reading of the love-poem, begging her forgiveness for my boldness, and making excuse for having a hankering after all such sweet things, which I ween was no fit occupation for such as I. But she was only

pleased the more with me for it, and said she would come often herself and read to me. For Monsieur le Marquis, she said, was not o'er fond of love-things, preferring history and the like deep works, far too full of science for her young imagination. So when she had out her Robbie Burns, or even Master Shakespeare, whom she admired exceedingly, and read to please herself, Monsieur de Saint-Rambert would fall immediately to snoring. After much talk on various subjects, and passing from one thing to another, the Lady Margaret opened her heart to me, and told me what it was that made her long for a friend to counsel her. When we had taken many turns up and down the little pebble-walk, and I had brought her back to the house-door because of the approaching darkness, I had learned something which troubled me, and gave me a feeling of great responsibility, — it was that the Lady Margaret had a lover, and that not a soul knew of it save herself and me.

CHAPTER II.

T was some time after that evening before I saw the Lady Margaret again. I looked for her every time I happened near the Rookery, or crossed the park and gardens; but I saw nothing, nor had any sign of her, so that I began to wonder what might have taken place. I feared lest Mistress Hyde, with her ever watchful eye, had in some way of her own discovered the Lady Margaret's secret, and was mayhap tormenting the poor child beyond endurance, as I knew she could do. I had a mind to go in one day and boldly ask for the young mistress, but waited, hoping I might get a glimpse of her at church the next morning.

It was well on toward Michaelmas, and there was a special service at the church. I

was just preparing to wend my way thither, as every good Christian would surely do at this pious season, and having tied my bonnet-strings, and wrapped my mantle close about me, and repeated my injunctions to Mildred about the roasting of the goose, I stepped into the garden to gather a handful of the last Michaelmas daisies to lay in the church-yard on my way to service, when there came a gentle tap at the garden-gate, which made me start as never a loud thump did; for it sounded like the call of some poor thing in trouble.

I hastened down the walk and opened the wicket, first peering through the thick screen of morning-glories that covered it, to look who my early visitor might be; and imagine my surprise, when I saw before me the pretty Lady Margaret, with only a bit of a silken scarf thrown round her head, her bright hair blown out from under it by the wind, and her cheeks made rosy with running.

"Sweet my Lady," I cried in astonishment, "you here so early in the morning, and not at chapel! What is it, my love?

Come, come in out of the chill, and tell me what 's your errand."

"Oh, Mistress Anne!" she cried, and could not speak another word for the feelings that were in her. I guessed it all in a minute, as soon as she looked up at me with her large dark eyes swimming in pitiful tears. With my own heart swelling, I led her into the cottage, and pulled the big chair near to the fire-hearth, and, sitting down, drew her in my lap, never heeding the service bells, — the good Lord forgive me, — which had been pealing for a full two minutes.

Then she threw her arms about my neck, and fell to sobbing dismally, and saying things between her sobs that I could scarce make out. But I was not slow to understand such moods, and I soon began to guess that she and Monsieur le Marquis had been having a sorry time about something serious, else she would not have taken it so to heart. For they were both hot-headed, the Lady Margaret and her father, and the French blood in them was quickly roused. And, though loving each other dearly, I knew that

they had words and vexations about one thing or another every fortnight or so. But when the artless child told me that her dauntless lover had been to ask Monsieur de Saint-Rambert for his daughter's hand in marriage, saying he had already won her heart, and a deal more daring nonsense, such as only rash youth and mad love would ever dream of saying; then I marvelled not that the high-spirited Marquis, with his fine old French temper, waxed very angry. He was an exceeding proud nobleman, was Monsieur le Marquis, and all through the time of his misfortunes his head was never less erect, I think, than in the days of his prosperity and youth. He vowed that the Lady Margaret was no daughter of his, if ever she gave her heart to a low-born man, and that it were rank folly for her even to think of the young miscreant; for in his rage he could not find words harsh enough for the ill-advised lover.

Now, my pretty Lady, being stricken deep with love for this same low-born miscreant, could see no reason in her father's wrath; and to speak truly, no more could I. For the young lover was in no wise a low-born

man, nor yet a miscreant, being a squire's son, a Welshman of very fair repute, comely of face and figure, and noble enough in heart, God knows! but not enough so in name and lineage to please the proud old Marquis. I have always thought that he secretly hoped for a great alliance for his fair daughter, — one that would give her a name as noble as his own, and shield her from the dangers with which his fortune was threatened. But the good gentleman was disappointed of all his hopes.

So, what with an undutiful child, as he called my poor Lady, and a determined lover, and an angry parent, I judged they had had a sorry time of it. The Marquis had spoken such bitter words to the poor child, that she was beside herself with grief, and had come to me for comfort. I tried to reason with her, and to talk wisdom, which I knew full well had little to do with an ill-starred love; but it came over me that I must be sage in my counsel at such a time, however much my heart yearned for the tender creature. And I was always pretty good at preaching, and had a marvellous store of reasoning,

save when it came to my own days of trouble, and then, God help me, there was never a heart more bitter or more untaught than mine.

The Lady Margaret rose so quickly, when I spoke of submission and her duty to her parent, that I was startled. She snatched the fleecy scarf from where it had fallen about her neck, and threw it almost into the blaze, so that I had to spring after it in good haste, and she stood before me, tall and trembling like an aspen leaf, her eyes flashing fire, as I had never seen them before, and said: "What! Mistress Anne, you whom I have made my friend, you would have me be false to my love, and cast him by, because he wears not a noble name! You do not mean a word of it; in your heart you know it is not just. Does not the motto of our noble house itself teach that love over-rideth all things, and maketh all things equal; and shall not I, even though I be the first to do it, live by that noble truth? Do not speak to me of dutiful love, nor of wisdom and obedience. My father cannot love me, since he would bring grief to me. He

does not love me, Mistress Anne, and no more do you if you take not my part; but my love does, and none else; and therefore will I go to him, and follow him to the world's end, and live and die for him if need be!"

We have all heard such words from passionate young lips. They are always said in moments like this. I said them myself once, though not so eloquently as the Lady Margaret; but what of that? the meaning was the same, and I felt as much. It all came back to me,—ah, yes, as I looked at the dear girl, so earnest, so loving, and so unhappy. What could I say to her? Her words and look disarmed me quite; and altogether forgetting the weight of my responsibility, I took her in my arms again, with a feeling in me I cannot call by name, and said, "Now, by Heaven, my love, you shall have your heart's desire, and I will be the first to help you." For I know not what came over me at that moment, but that my very soul seemed to burst forth like a long-pent-up stream, and go out to her in her trouble, and make everything easy but the thought of seeing her suffer.

Now, it may be the mark of a seared conscience in me, but I could never quite bring myself to think that I did wrong in shielding and helping these two loving souls. For this is one of my maxims, that we should make the most of what joy we find in the world, whether it be for ourselves or for our fellows, and that if we but bring the light of consolation to a single human life, we have done a golden deed.

Upon hearing such unexpected words of promise, the pretty dear flew at me, and gave me such a kissing and squeezing that my bonnet and hair-pins went dancing merrily about the room, and my feast-day garb was in a sad plight. We sat down again, and she told me the whole story without any tears this time, save those she wept for joy and gratefulness at having found so good a friend in me, she said, calling me her dearest Mistress Anne, and making me such sweet speeches and pretty compliments that my head turned quite giddy, and I did nothing but sit by and smile, and listen to her as she planned matters to suit herself, with never so much as a tremble when she reminded me of

my rash promise and vowed that she would hold me to it. But many and many a time in the days that followed, did I have reason to tremble; for what with the occasional prickings of my cowardly conscience and the fear of Monsieur le Marquis's displeasure at the unruliness of his child, and wondering whether I was doing the right thing by her, I slept upon an uneasy bed.

The Lady Margaret came to see me very often after that St. Michael's day, and none suspected the meaning of her visits. There was nothing strange in her liking to come to our farm, because every one in the village knew that there was always good hospitality to be found there, and that we plumed ourselves on giving the best we had to our high-born visitors, whenever it pleased God we had them. Then, the walk from the Rookery was but a hundred rods, and was withal a most enchanting way; first across the wooded park so cool and sequestered, with the shade of its oaks and larches, and its leafy chestnuts; then down the avenue of silvery beech-trees, turning and twisting their slender branches overhead into a kind of green

labyrinth, with shady hollows in unlooked-for places, and tempting nooks here and there, bidding one stop and muse in them. It was a veritable paradise for young lovers, wherein to commune in comfort and sweet solitude. Many is the time we sat there, the Lady Margaret and I, and plotted, — for folk with a secret must ever be a-plotting in order to keep it such, and there was no fitter spot to the purpose. Through all the pleasant autumn days that followed she was with me, and we busied ourselves with her pretty things, — old gowns of silk and satin, and handsome laces and fine linens, brought all the way from this gay land of vanities, and which, with her dainty taste to help me, I fashioned into the prettiest frippery that ever a young bride wore. For I was deft of finger in those days, and she had a great mind to make herself bewitching for her young lover, though I doubt not she would have been fair to him in any garb, as fair indeed she was.

So we were happy in our secret for a few short weeks; at least, the Lady Margaret was so, for she had not yet learned what trouble may come of loving. They who see

these things with wisdom say it is ever so with love; that while it brings a brief hour of happiness in one hand, oft in the other it brings a lifetime of woe. I am far too unwise to understand the reason of it, yet I know there is truth in the words. But the Lady Margaret would never think it, and I would not for all the world have been the one to undeceive her.

As for myself, I would sometimes feel like the veriest villain in a conspiracy, if perchance I came upon Monsieur le Marquis on my way through the park, and he gave me a kind word in passing, as he was wont to do, for he was a true nobleman, his pride and temper notwithstanding. But, the saints bless his memory! he never once suspected my treason, nor guessed one half the thoughts that lay hidden within my bonnet, as I saluted him with due humility. Men know so little of women's guile that I verily believe he thought the Lady Margaret had of a sudden grown submissive, and that down in his heart he forgave her, and repented having been so stern with her. For she was turned as sweet and docile as a young lamb, and

had no look of misery in her pretty eyes, as though she would fain die of thwarted love. Far from it: she was as bright and rosy and happy as any maid in England, — too happy, perhaps, for a maiden who had been bidden to banish her lover and never speak his name again. However that might have been, she spoke of him to me very often, and wrote him tender missives that were so full of love and joy and hope that I wondered if such happiness could long be, in a world which at times seems meant only for griefs. Ah, how soon had I learned to be afraid of much happiness!

CHAPTER III.

The Lady Margaret continued to make me frequent visits all that autumn, and often her lover came also, and they would take this time for all their love-making, and they were happy as people are only once in their lives, albeit they pined for each other wretchedly between whiles. I cannot tell what spirit had possession of me in those days, but I felt a strange keen pleasure in protecting them and shielding their love from those that had a right, perhaps, to forbid it. I had been robbed of so much myself that I would have them have their full share of love-making and mine, too, for the matter of that, while they might. But certain it was that they were safe and

happy through those brief sweet hours, till many a day had slipped by, and no one was the wiser, not even my dear David; for we chose our own times for these meetings, and no one was ever less observing in like matters than was my brother David.

But, if you will believe it, the surety of happiness soon grew too tame for these two eager young things, and on some pretext or another the lover must hasten away from England, and the Lady Margaret cannot think of his going without her; and nothing will do but they must be wedded in secret, and I must bring the matter about for them before the next Christmas-tide.

I thought myself wise in those days, for though I was not an old woman as I am now, I had lived a long life; yet I doubt much if to-day I should have the courage to venture upon so unadvised a thing as marrying a man and a maid against a parent's wish.

The season was a bleak one, as the late autumns are apt to be in our northern country, and more than usual cold; a raw chill wind blowing from the coast, and howling

over the naked hills, bringing with it a rare smell of fallen leaves and dying flowers. A cold promise of snow hung in the gray clouds overhead, and the frisksomeness of the brown squirrel was enough to warn one that a sharp winter was well upon us. I dreaded the cold perhaps more than master squirrel, because a cold winter meant hard work and much care for poor David, with the cattle and the sheep left without pasture, and everything freezing round about us. Then there was always more suffering and misery throughout the country in the wintry season, for many of our village folk were poor as need be, and some were feeble or ailing, and my very heart ached to think of them.

Now, upon a certain December evening, the time and scene of which comes back to me as vividly as if it were but a yesterday's happening, I was sitting beside our kitchen hearth warming myself by the cheerful blaze, while a dismal tempest raged outside. The cold wind was whipping the bare vines across the window-panes, and whirling itself around the house so like a hurricane that every dish

and platter rattled from its place in the cupboard. It came howling down the gables and chimney with a mournful, threatening sound that made me thank God I had a good thatched roof above my head and a good blazing fire before me, and plenty of victuals in our larders, and that Mildred was, at that very minute, cooking up the savoriest of suppers, and above all, that I had a dear good brother David, who would soon come in with a tremendous appetite, to eat it. I could not but call to mind all these blessings, I say, as I looked out upon the raw and stormy night, and I tried to be truly grateful for them. For I was apt to be unmindful of Heaven's real mercies, while dwelling selfishly upon grievances which David was wont to call my romantic rubbish.

David, it need scarce be said, has never known the mad anguish that comes of loving unwisely ; for though younger than myself by several years, he has always been older in good judgment. He knew but little of women's ways of feeling in those days, and mine, perhaps, least of all, they being at times incomprehensible even to myself. But

Heaven knows, I love him none the less for it; for David has ever been a good brother to me, and my only friend in the days when I needed friends most. Every one is fond of David, he is so strong, so honest, so kind to those about him, and he can no more help it than the sun can help warming the places on which it shines. His heart is so big that there is room enough in it for every one; children come to him for their frolic, young people for companionship, and older ones for advice, and he can help us all. In short, what more can I say of him but that he is the best of brothers!

That night, I had a mind to take a basket of victuals and some warm clothing to poor bedridden Jenny and her houseful of little ones, as I feared they might fare worse on account of the increasing cold, having little else besides one another to keep them warm. And I was dreading the journey thither, as I always do a sniff of frosty air, for they lived a long way beyond the river, when in came David, whistling and puffing in his hearty way, as he brushed the flurries of new snow from his great-coat. As I might have ex-

pected, he forbade my stepping out on such a night as this, and said at once that he would take the things to Jenny himself. and go without his own evening meal, rather than that they should want an hour longer. Now, this was a stout proof of David's kind heart, for which I kissed him, knowing what a great amount of room there was inside him crying to be filled up after a long day's work in the sharp brisk air. I would have had him stop to eat his own supper ere he started out; but he would not, fearing the poor things might have gone to bed hungry, and saying his appetite would be all the keener for a good tramp of three miles or more.

Now, as luck would have it, David did not return till very late into the night; for when he reached the poor widow's hut, and found the wind whistling through every crack and chink in the wall, and the flakes of snow that were now descending upon everything with a mad sort of delight, driven through the broken panes, what does he do but set to work stopping up the chinks with straw, and nailing boards along the cracks and broken windows, and fetch-

ing armful after armful of under-brush and small wood from along the river-bank. Then he makes a rousing good fire, and warms their supper for them, and makes them comfortable for the night, never once thinking of the hunger gnawing at his own belt-strings.

I remember every bit and part of it, through these five-and-twenty years, because I have always looked upon it as the doings of a mysterious fate that David should have been kept away so very late that night; for during his absence wondrous strange things took place which I know right well he never had allowed, had he known aught of them. I had said nothing to him of the Lady Margaret's doings, knowing how little heart he set by all such things, and, too, because she had made me her confidante, and begged me to keep her secret well from every one. Dear, unsuspecting David had scarce gone out beyond the shadow of the tall elms that rose about the farm-house, when I saw by the light of the half-opened door where I stood to light him out, two figures coming towards me,

in the avenue leading from the Rookery, walking as slowly as though it had been a summer's night, and as unmindful of the storm around them as if they had been treading on flowery meadows with the harvest-moon shining down upon them. At first I was startled, and had half a mind to call David back, when of a sudden I recognized the Lady Margaret's graceful shape, even through the fluttering snow-drops, and by her side a tall, manly figure, whose face I could not see, for it was so much in the shadow with leaning down towards hers, but whom I had good cause to know by his attitude. I had not time to wonder what they might have it in their mind to do on so unpromising a night, only to feel a sudden pall come over me, as when a serious moment, though long expected, has come indeed.

The next minute they were both indoors, and the Lady Margaret had thrown off her cloak, and stood before me, looking as fair as an angel, while her lover could do naught but stare at her, and drink in the fulness of her loveliness and youth.

"Dear Mistress Anne," she said, taking me round the waist with both arms and looking up at me with a face like a nosegay, "we are come here to-night to be married, if you please, while the dear good David is out, and to receive your blessing."

"Blessings upon me!" I cried. "Come here to be married, on such a night as this, and in my humble dwelling! My love, do I hear you aright?" for I fell into great perplexity, and could scarce believe my ears.

"Quite right," rejoined my Lady, laughing outright at my discomfiture. "And, dear Anne, the parson will be here directly, for we have been to him, and he knows what is expected of him to-night."

"The parson!" I ejaculated. "Oh, merciful saints, what is to come of all this!"

"A wedding," continued she, in the same excited, playful tones. "A wedding, my dear, and you must make ready for it. I would be married nowhere save in this little house where you have made us so happy, dear Anne, and with no one to witness but your own good self."

"My sweet child," said I, "have you

thought of the night, how dark and wild it is? 'T is such an ill omen to be wed on a stormy night."

"As to the night, good Mistress Anne, the wilder the better; no one will be abroad. Now, come, make ready, dear; for we are in great haste."

Here my wits forsook me quite, and I fell in a chair, weeping heartlessly, as though at their happiness.

"Pray, do not grieve, dearest, dearest friend," she cried, coming to me and kissing me a dozen times. "You know that I should die if it were not so. My love is going away to-night, and I must go with him. You have promised to help us, and now the time is come. Do not weep for me, dear Anne; I shall always remember you and love you for the comfort you have given me."

As if to echo her words, her lover came and knelt on the other side of me, and took my hand and kissed it, while my dear Lady shed a few tears; it was in truth a most pitiful scene, and one happening in just then might have thought me the heroine of it.

Then I, comprehending slowly that it was their firm intention to be wedded ere they left my presence, did summon up all my courage for the event, only making a little resistance for the sake of appeasing my conscience.

"But, my love," said I, "what shall I say to Monsieur le Marquis, who will blame me for my just share in all this?"

"Not so, Mistress Anne; my father will blame no one but me, if I know him rightly. But I have written him a letter telling him everything, and asking him to forgive me if he can."

"And your maid, my sweet Lady, how may you go away so without a maid? You must surely take me with you," for I was ready to face anything rather than meet Monsieur le Marquis's reproach, and the lonely remorsefulness that would come thereafter.

"Oh, Mistress Anne," said my Lady, smiling again, "I shall not need a maid, you know, for I am not to be a great lady, but a simple gentleman's wife; and I could not think of taking you away from dear David, who cannot do without you. You must stay with him,

and to tell me how my father bears the loss of his unruly child."

I saw a look of regret steal into her lover's eyes as she spoke thus, and I fancied he was thinking of all that she was giving up for love of him, and wondering whether he was worth it. She saw it, too, and ran to him, and whispered some tender things that were not meant for my ears, I fancy. I knew very well that it was she who with her impetuous spirit had brought this all about, and that she would force me to think it right, so long as it made them both happy.

In a moment more, the parson came in, surely enough, with a large book under his arm, and a look of ease and cheerful expectancy, which made me feel at once less guilty. I have no doubt the worthy man heeded little the responsibility of the thing, and was thinking with glee only of the bright guineas that would reward him for his share in these doings, and perhaps of the good supper to follow, for he knew my talent for roasting a fowl or seasoning a haunch of venison, and had tasted many a savory morsel from our larder; for if there ever was in England a

sanctific with a ticklish palate, it was our parson at Wolverton.

Before I could well collect my senses, — for it was all done in a twinkling, — my Lady and her lover stood in front of the parson, and there, in my very kitchen, — as it was there we had the best fire, — in the face of all my pans and kettles, which, I am proud to remember, were as bright and clean as though furbished up for the occasion, those two daring young creatures were wedded one to the other, and were the happier for it to their short life's end. The Lady Margaret stood upright and graceful as a white lily, looking brave and happy throughout the ceremony, and her words of promise were clear and strong as from the very depths of her young soul. I can see her now as she appeared to me that night, so fearless, so reckless, proud to give up her all for the man she loved, surrendering herself to his keeping, a glad prisoner, living for him alone, ready to die for him as she had said. I could not but admire the brave girl, and yet marvel at the magic power of such love. I was the first to take her in my arms and wish her a whole

life's happiness, and then we wrote our names in the book which the parson had brought, and it was all over.

Now, let those who will condemn me for an old simpleton and a sentimental fool for my share in this affair. I was neither so old nor so wise as I am now, I have said it; yet now I think on it again, I am not sure that I would not do the same weak thing over to-day, if need were. And as for any that would do otherwise, let them look to their own hard-heartedness; that is all I have to say about the matter.

Then, what else could I do but give them a good supper, ere they set out on their wild journey, — the good supper I had been saving for David? For who ever heard of a wedding without a wedding-feast! The parson partook well and heartily of it, and in right good spirits, too, and drank much of our home-brewed ale, which he said to be the very finest he had ever tasted, and took the whole matter with so much unconcern, as if wedding a young pair secretly, and on the Evil One's own night, were his chief employ, and a most righteous act withal.

But the good parson was off betimes, knowing that every minute was precious. In truth, the Lady Margaret had but the time to wrap her cloak about her, and say a few broken, loving words to me, ere the coach came to take them away. She bade me think of her and love her always, saying I had been her dearest friend, and, Heaven help me! her best counsellor! Then she was gone, leaning upon her husband's arm, her face like an April sky, full of tears and smiles; out into the snow and cold, into the wildness of that dark night. I stood looking after them till I heard the closing of the coach door, and the tramping of the horses die away in the storm, and then I turned and found myself alone once more, dazed and stunned like one waking out of a strange dream, and with a coldness about my heart that sickened me.

When David got back that night, there was no supper left for him, and he scolded not, nor did he make any inquiry as to the reason of it, knowing by my face and eyes that something uncommon had happened. But what, and how much, he did not learn

till some days after, — till I myself told him, for very need of his great strength to comfort me. And I will say thus much, by way of singing David's praises, that he has never in all his life quizzed me unduly about myself; and that is, perhaps, the way in which he has drawn from me, one after another, my innermost confidences.

CHAPTER IV.

COLD winter did come, as every one expected it would, and that night was the beginning of it. All through the silent hours I lay with eyes wide open staring into the dark, not able to lull myself into an hour's sleep, for thinking of what had happened and trying to reconcile myself to it. I heard the fluff of the large snow-flakes heaping themselves on every window-ledge. When I arose to look out upon the early morning, everything was wrapped in a sheet of white snow; even the hedges were buried quite out of sight, and the trees were bending low, almost to the ground, with the weight of ice and snow upon their branches. And still the white spangles fell from the

leaden skies above, cold and unceasing, as if bent on filling every crack and crevice round about us. David was up betimes, with spade and shovel; and with our farm-boy to hold the lantern for him, he soon cleared the paths round the house, and made a way to the stables and barns to see how the cattle and poultry had fared during the night. He found them all alive, albeit somewhat astonished at the biting frost. It was a hard-working season for poor David, for what with going out in quest of the sheep, some of which lay buried in the drifts along the hillsides, and housing the shivering flock, and spiking the river and ponds in the thin places, to get them water, for every stream and trough had a good coat of ice over it, there was enough to keep half a dozen stout farmers like David from growing weary of the flight of time.

I could not tell whether it was more to hide his thoughts than to keep his young blood warm that David labored with such good will all through that cold season; but I know that he was at it early and late, scarcely taking time to eat his meals, and

coming in at such late hours of an evening that he was always too tired to sit and talk with me, as was our custom, but went straight to bed instead, and left me to my own anxious thoughts. David's heart is so tender, for all his yeoman's strength and silent ways, that I knew right well he did this more in kindness to me than for any other reason; for he was not long in guessing that I knew more of the Lady Margaret's flight than I had cared to tell him, and he knew, too, that I would end by making a clean breast of everything to him, if only he bided his time in silence and patience.

As for me, I was so oppressed with the weight of my secret that the days and nights that followed were all one to me with fretting, and I wondered if the time would ever come when I could confess what I had done, and either be absolved or punished for it, to the great quietude of my conscience.

It was well-nigh a fortnight before I learned to my satisfaction how the Lady Margaret's flight had affected Monsieur le Marquis, and what the folk at the Rookery

thought of it all. I had not seen a soul from there since the night of the great storm, the paths being obstructed by such a depth of snow; and as Mildred was just like a cat for going near the cold or wet, and I had reasons for not venturing thither myself, David had done all the going to and fro, and in this wise had learned all that I was pining to know. But David was as close-mouthed as a sign-post, and I could get naught from him without questions, and this I would not do for fear of committing myself. So I waited with what patience I could, till I myself felt brave enough to go to the Rookery on some pretext or other. But I found no pretext, or rather would make none; so that the days passed and we were well on towards the Christmas-tide.

Upon a quiet Sunday morning, somewhere near that period, David had gone to service without me, for I durst not yet look the parson in the face, and I made excuse for staying at home on pretence of looking to the dinner, which I always tried to have a bit more savory of a Sunday, to reward David for his good week's work. It was a

glorious day, calm and bright, and steeped in that quiet peace which rests over nature upon a country Sabbath. The fresh-fallen snow and the long icicles on the dark branches shimmered like myriads of trembling crystals in the morning sunlight. The little sparrows, whose brown coats formed the only bit of color on the pale landscape, hopped about with a merry twitter, and everything seemed to be making ready for the approaching Christmas-feast. I looked towards the gray gables of the Rookery, emerging through the sparkling trees, and wondered sadly how it was with Monsieur le Marquis, and what his thoughts might be as he looked out upon this fair morning. Was he thinking of the daughter who had gone from him in his old age and left him with only the grief of his wounded pride? My heart smote me so that I resolved to go to him now, at once, without another day's waiting, and tell him what I had done, and beg his forgiveness for my sweet Lady and me. It was a mad thought, though good enough of purpose; for what right had I, indeed, to go to Monsieur de Saint-Rambert

and speak to him of his grief, or to come before his presence without being asked? Monsieur le Marquis was a very high-born gentleman, and I a stupid country wench. What business of mine was it to try to bring him comfort? True, his daughter had made a friend of me, bless her sweet condescension! and had bidden me speak well of her to her father, — and how, in truth, could I have done otherwise? But Monsieur le Marquis was in no mood to be conciliated, as I learned afterwards, and I had every reason to be thankful that I was interrupted by a sharp rap at the door, just as I was preparing to set out on my wild errand. Of course, these reflections did not come to me till David came home from church, and we had talked the matter over sensibly, as one is always sure to do when talking with him.

As if in response to the thoughts I had been pursuing, whom should I see on opening the door, but Mistress Hyde, standing before me, a grim spectacle, looking blacker and blinking faster than ever? I knew the minute I set eyes upon her that she was in

what we were wont to call "one of her black moods." For though she held so fine a place in Monsieur le Marquis's household, every one there knew her for a proud, disdainful woman, whom Monsieur de Saint-Rambert kept in his home only for her great cleverness, and for what learning she might impart to his young daughter. So, wholly out of respect for him, did I try to be amiable, though Heaven knows she was the last person I wished to see! I courtesied low, and asked her how she did, and to what good-fortune I owed the honor of a visit from her.

"To your own treachery, Mistress Anne," she replied, in tones so awful that I thought surely my time of judgment was come.

Woman-like, I pretended not to understand the meaning of her words, and said quite innocently, "Treachery, Mistress Hyde? Pray do not speak in riddles, for I am very stupid at guessing."

"You are a wicked creature," she returned, still blinking, and looking hard at me to make me feel like a very criminal. "How dare you talk so lightly of your own sin,

when you ought to blush and hide your face for very shame?"

"I know not what sin it is you accuse me of," I said, looking her full in the eye, and speaking with a boldness that astonished me, "and I am neither so clever nor so ready as yourself to say sour things, but I would have you know, Mistress Hyde, that my brother David and I are honest folk, and well respected in our village, and that it ill behooves you to come here and lay any such accusation at my door."

"Oh, you need not grow so red in your defence!" said she, with an ugly curl of her lip, for I doubt not I had waxed a bit warm in speaking, and my fear of her had quite vanished. "I know well that the Lady Margaret was with you a deal too often before she left her father's house."

"The Lady Margaret was good enough to make me her friend," I replied, with a certain triumph I was unable to repress.

"A friend, indeed! A fine friend you have been to her, with your counsels and confidences! What has come of it? She has deserted her home, her father, and

better friends than you," meaning herself, "for a vulgar, low-born man of your choosing, perhaps."

"Enough!" I cried, burning with indignation; "it is not here that you will speak ill of the Lady Margaret, or of those who are dear to her. Your words show that you are speaking in ignorance. If you are come to question me and satisfy your own curiosity, you have made a grievous error, for I shall be the last to enlighten you upon any of my Lady Margaret's doings."

She bit her lips, seeing I had guessed her purpose too readily, and glared at me furiously, growing darker and more unsightly every minute with the envious passion that moved her. I thought, as I looked at her, that I had never beheld anything so fearful as an angry woman. Jealousy, malice, and hatred were stamped upon her countenance, and made her seem a very fiend. Heaven knows, she was never too good to look at; but that day she stood before me like a fearful lesson, a warning to me to rein my temper, and quell the angry fire that would rise in my

heart at times, and smother it, ere it had time to make a devil of me.

"If I can serve you in naught else," said I, quietly, "I shall be happy to wish you a good-morning."

"You are an impertinent hussy," retorted she, with the lofty disdain of a vanquished enemy; "you shall have cause to regret all you have done, as well as what you have said to me to-day;" and without so much as a glance at me, she walked out, slamming the door hard after her.

When she was gone, I seemed to have no strength left; I fell into a chair and wept aloud for a full quarter-hour. It was in this state that David found me on his return from church, and then there was nothing to do but to confess everything, and this I did without fear of being hardly dealt with by him. I was not mistaken; for when he had listened to all I had to say, he looked grave only for a moment, and then he took my head between his hands and said in his kindly voice, —

"You have done unwisely, sister Anne, it cannot be gainsaid, but be it far from me

to reproach you for a too tender heart. I cannot think that you are a great sinner, nor yet a traitor, nor any of the things which Mistress Hyde has called you; but, sister mine, away with your romantic notions; they will play you a deal of mischief yet, have I not said so oft?"

"Yes, David, many a time before; but you can never understand me in these feelings, for you have never loved in the way that makes people do foolish things. And though I am old enough to be wiser, I — well, I cannot forget, that is all."

He looked at me kindly, as if to beg my pardon for nearing a tender subject, and then we laid the matter aside for that day. But it was from him that I learned later what the state of things was yonder at the Rookery, for he had heard much during his daily visits thither. Poor Monsieur le Marquis was indeed sorely grieved, and I was doubly so to learn of it. The servants at the house said that all night he walked his chamber, talking low to himself, and all day he sat by his window and spoke never a word. It was so unlike him to take any dis-

appointment in this calm despairing way, that they were all frightened, and knew not what to think of it. He had not uttered a single angry word, or spoken of his sorrow to any one. He had been seen to read the Lady Margaret's letter on the morning after her departure, and then he had thrown it into the flames, and sat with his head buried in his hands until the candles were brought in that evening. No one dared to speak aloud, and the house was as if there had been a death in it.

Now, Mistress Hyde was doubtless much chagrined at not having been taken into Monsieur le Marquis's confidence, and perhaps more so at having lost her pupil, and thereby her place in the Saint-Rambert household. She had waited as long as she had patience for a word from him, and then had come to

see what she might learn from me, as the most likely person to be suspected, and one on whom to vent her rage. She had borne me no good-will ever since the Lady Margaret had first taken to running over to the farm and to me for companionship, and she had spared no chance of showing her feelings. Had she been a different woman, — a woman with a tender nature, as every woman's should be, — I had told her everything that morning, for very need of woman's help and woman's sympathy in shouldering the burden of my responsibility, and mayhap through her aid the Lady Margaret and her father had been reconciled. But I knew well that her only thought was for self, as her ill-concealed rage plainly showed, and I would have died sooner than give her a word of satisfaction against my sweet Lady.

It may have been a fortnight or more later when she betook herself out of Wolverton, leaving but scanty regrets behind her; and I have never, to this day, laid eyes on her again, to my great contentment, though she did vow eternal vengeance upon me the last time we took leave of one another.

About the rest of that winter I remember but little, save that at Christmas-time some sweet remembrances came to me from the Lady Margaret, and a letter which carried so many loving wishes to us, and spoke of so much happiness, that it broke in upon us like a streak of sunlight and set my mind at peace for many a day thereafter. As for poor Monsieur le Marquis, I could never learn what his real thoughts were, for he bore his trouble in pitiful silence. As long as the snows covered the ground, he still sat by his fire alone, thinking gloomily; and when the springtime came, he drove out in the park or walked in his garden, with his white head up and his hands clasped behind him, looking very grave and forbidding.

At the end of that summer he went back to the old château near Avignon, in his beloved Provence. For now that he was alone, he feared not what his wild and revolutionary generation might do with an old man like him. He would go to his own country, in spite of its dangers and terrors, and live the few years that were left him in the beautiful land where he had once been happy.

Then the years slipped away quietly, as the years are apt to do for simple country-folk like David and me; for there was very little stirring in our village, save the news that came from abroad of the glorious deeds of the new republic, and even that seemed very far to us at Wolverton. David worked hard at the farm, troubling himself but little with politics, which, he declared, a man could not do without damaging his trade and his conscience; and the affairs of kingdoms were not one half so consequent to him as the good harvests he was reaping, and the fine sheep and poultry he sent each year to market. And I, trying to do my duty by him, as every good sister should, attended to the house matters and made him comfortable; for David, like all strong men, loves nothing better than the care and coddling of a woman, and all my thought was for him. The time soon came, however, when I was forced to give a place in my heart to others; hence if I speak of him but little hereafter in the spinning out of my story, you may be sure that I shall think of him and love him none the less.

CHAPTER V.

WICE the young robins had built their nests in the vines that clambered about the windows of the Rookery, and twice the sharp winds of December had driven them away, before the Lady Margaret returned to our little town of Wolverton; but those two short years had brought her the greatest sorrow that falls to woman. Scarcely had she had time to taste of her new happiness, when the young husband was summoned away to join the wars that were raging throughout the country at that time. Ah me! many and many a heart was made desolate then, but none so desolate as my poor Lady's. She told me afterwards how, in those last few moments before parting, she had clung to him, feeling in some vague, despairing way

that she should never look upon him more. But he, so young and full of life and strength, had left her with only words of promise and of hope. Alas! they were, indeed, his last farewell to her on earth.

Ere the first snows had covered his far-away resting-place, a little comforter came to the sorrowing young wife, — a wee, tender, nestling creature, who very soon filled a place in all our hearts. Now, this was "My Lady;" for so we have called her ever since, for her sweet young mother's sake, and being myself fond of our good old English titles which mean so much to me. This winsome babe, I say, was she whom I still call my darling and my Maidie, and a most dear maid is she.

When the Lady Margaret's trouble came, she had turned to me for help and comfort; for whom had she else now to help her bear this grief, save me, who had seen her in the fulness of her joy, and beheld her in this hour of deepest sorrow? It was in the springtime that she came to me, when the roses were just returning, and our little town was gay with flowers and sunshine, as it is

always in the summer-time, to atone for its bleakness and dreariness in the winter. It was then that she and her little child came to us. I remember to this day, though many years have passed between, how white and tearful she looked as she stepped into the garden, turning about her to see everything as she had left it, save that now she was widowed and desolate, and all the sunlight in nature could not warm the winter in her heart. Yet when she greeted me her sweet face broke into a smile, as though at having found a haven of peace. The little one in her arms, too, seemed to know that she was a welcome little guest, and cooed and laughed at me so merrily that I straightway took it from its mother's arms, and from that time claimed all care of it; and the baby Llora seemed to belong to me as much as to her young mamma. In truth, she has been my one thought and joy ever since the day when she was left wholly to my keeping. For though at first the change had seemed to brighten the Lady Margaret's spirit, yet as the days wore on her face grew thinner and whiter, and I could not but see, with

fainting heart, that she too would soon be taken away. There are those whom grief kills, and she was such a one, I know. So hopeful, so overflowing with life as she had been in the time of her happiness, the cruel blow had come upon her suddenly and crushed her quite.

Ofttimes she would walk over to the Rookery, now lonely and deserted, and spend her mornings about the old place, recalling the years she had spent there and all their tender memories, with fresh tears. And then she would come home and speak to me of her father, wondering if he would not soften toward her if he knew of her grief. "I must write to him, must I not? and beg him for my little child's sake to receive me. He cannot withhold his pardon from me now. It is not for myself I would ask it, for I know that I have but a short while to live here without my beloved, but for my little daughter whom he must love. And you, Mistress Anne, you will care for her, and be near her always, will you not? Promise me, dearest friend, that you will not leave her to another's care when I am gone." And she

would sob and weep upon my neck in utter wretchedness.

Then I would try to turn her from such dismal thoughts, and to cheer her with the hope that Monsieur le Marquis would surely relent, and send for her and my little Lady to come back to the old château and live with him many years happily, and that I would follow her thither if need were; for I knew that Monsieur le Marquis loved his daughter exceedingly in spite of his terrible pride, and that he might be moved, if she did but humble herself enough to ask for pardon. But she would only smile at me through her tears, and shake her head unbelievingly. Yet the thought of writing to her father having once taken hold of her, she could think of nothing else till it was done. The Lady Margaret knew that she was well-born. She had come to England very young, but she still remembered the fine old château and her father's lands in Provence, and in her misfortune her mind had dwelt with fondness on the old scenes of her own childhood, and she had hoped that her child would also learn to call it home.

One evening she sat down and wrote Monsieur le Marquis a long and eloquent letter, which she read to me when it was done. Ah, such a letter as that was! I had never read its like. It was not humble or penitent, look you, for she, too, was a Saint-Rambert, and none of that name had ever been suspected of humility. She held to the very last that she had done rightly in giving herself to the man she loved. But it was a beautiful letter, proud and well-spoken, such as only his child could write, and which should have moved Monsieur le Marquis, forsooth! She asked no pity save for the fatherless babe who was as innocent as it was helpless, and who would be the one to suffer by his refusal.

As soon as the letter was sealed and gone, her spirits seemed to revive a little as with expectation of what would be the result of it. Her mind dwelt upon it hourly through the day, wondering how long a time it would be ere it reached Monsieur le Marquis, what he would think when he received it, and how he would reply to it, if he did at all, and how soon! Unhappily in those days it took a

weary time for a message to go across the Continent, and in these times of strife and turmoil the couriers travelled slowly, and often were prevented from passing the borders. A scrap of paper with a noble name upon it stood every chance of being snatched up by some rabid malcontent, and burned like some dire instrument of witchcraft. I strove to make her see all the uncertainty there was in it, that she might not hope too much and mayhap come to disappointment. But the hope that had ever been so strong in her and was now her very food, kept her alive through many a long day of waiting.

All unconscious of any trouble around her, our little Maidie grew wondrous fast, even as a young flower-bud opens each day beneath the eye of summer. Very soon her childish prattle filled the house from morn to evening. Such a rose of a babe I had never seen. Her eyes were the color of deep purple pansies, and soon began to show by their sparkling fire all the mischief that was in her; while her yellow Welsh locks would have made you think her a veritable little cherub. Scarce more than a year was gone, and she

was as nimble on her feet as a young kitten, and she ran away from us so often that my hair began to turn gray from that time. Bless her dear soul, and mine too, it makes me almost young to think of her in those days, — how we used to hunt for her in garret and cellar, in the kitchen-garden, and out among the hay-ricks, and then, as likely as not, David would come home with her on his great shoulder, having found her in the wheat-field, her small round head just peeping above the young blades, and she, thinking it all great frolic, would hold out her hands full of red poppies which she had plucked, for she was ever passionately fond of bright things, and put up her small mouth to be kissed, feigning all innocence ; whereupon we would take her in our arms by turns, her mother and I, and kiss her for all punishment, and thus began her early training.

The chickens and the geese were one of her pet delights ; she would whirl in the midst of them with arms outstretched like a small windmill, for the sake of seeing them run and hearing their disordered cackle. There

was also the big white rooster with an especially fine red comb which pleased my little Lady exceedingly. She loved to follow after him, albeit very cautiously, her face glowing with excitement, till master cock would of a sudden turn upon her and give a loud and piercing crow. Then she would be so startled that she would fain run and hide herself in Mildred's apron, laughing all the while, and yet never tiring of the game.

I very soon saw in her the strong determined spirit that had been her young mother's. She would have her little way, and no other, and was mistress of us all, and David was her veriest slave. It was he who fell into the way of calling her my Lady and her Ladyship, because of her little airs of grandeur, and the fine way in which she ordered folk about. If she had not had the sweet, loving, beautiful nature that is hers, she would have been a spoiled child ere this day of my writing her story. But there was that about her which made everybody love her in spite of her many pranks. For she grew in mischief as well as in years, as every wholesome child must do, only that

"David would come home with her on his great shoulder."

there was plenty of good in her to counterbalance, when the right time came. What a little witch she was at times, to be sure! Her eyes were always darker when she was pondering some new roguishness, and they shone like the brightest of jewels in their halo of yellow curls. Her little teeth were sharp and white, and she was fond of showing them when things did not quite suit her babyship. And I used always to say, when I saw her at it, that little head will take it into itself to do something crazy some day. Such a strong will and such impossible desires I had never seen in child before. Such force in that small white fist when she doubled it up and shook it at me, if haply I pulled one of her hairs in dressing her yellow locks! If I tried to chide her for her ill-behaving, she would turn upon her tiny heels, and make a grimace at me. Then I would feign to grieve and cry, putting my apron before my eyes, and this would send her flying back to me, repentant and good; so that I could only catch her up and cover her with kisses, and could not for the life of me have helped loving the winsome, playful child.

But with the Lady Margaret she was ever sweet and gentle, seeming to feel, without knowing it, that the pale young mother was weak and sorrowful, and must not be troubled with noise and prattle. I would see her sit beside her mother for a long time without speaking, just watching her with a look of innocent inquiry in her baby face, as though wondering why she seemed so far away. It was the beginning of that earthly separation, I think, which came so very soon, and left my little Lady with only a lowly friend like me to love and mother her.

CHAPTER VI.

PASSED with no great change in our quiet life. David had gathered in another harvest, and another bleak winter was upon us; but not a word had come from Provence. I was not so surprised as I was grieved for my poor Lady's sake. I knew, and none else better, the pangs of feverish hope and bitter disappointment which she suffered every day and every week that passed. Never did a rap sound at the door but her heart leaped at it; never did she hear an unfamiliar voice in the house, but she started as if with the thought that the thing she waited for so eagerly was come to her at last. And as each day closed with her hope unfulfilled, she went to her bed weaker and sadder, and

I could not mistake but see how very frail she grew, and how slender was the thread by which her young life held. I spoke of my fears to David, and finding that he shared them, I sat down and wrote a letter myself to Monsieur de Saint-Rambert, telling him of his daughter's low state, and all the pitiful things I could bring my wits to think of. I hoped to touch his proud old heart; for in those days my pen was glibber than my tongue, and I could plead for her as she would ne'er have done for herself. But I said not a word to the Lady Margaret about my doing this, fearing to raise her hopes a second time without just reason to do so.

It was now my turn to live in fretful impatience. How the time went between the writing of that letter and the happenings at the close of that year, I know not; but I know that it seemed an endless time to me, though I had much to busy my hands with and to keep my mind from vain imaginings.

On the last day of the old year the Lady Margaret did not rise from her bed. It was a Sunday, and on my return from

early service I slipped into her room with a nosegay and a cup of tea, as I was wont to do of a morning. When I looked down at her white worn face, I saw she had not closed her eyes in sleep that night. There was a strange fixedness in them that made my heart leap of a sudden. She held out her hand to me, and the faintest smile moved her lips as she repeated her daily inquiry.

"No news from my father, good Mistress Anne?"

She had come to put the question so, as if fully expecting a negative answer. "Not yet, my sweet Lady; but mayhap there will be something coming to-morrow to gladden the New Year for us all."

"The New Year," she repeated dreamily; "and how soon is it, Mistress Anne?"

"To-morrow, my precious. It is not long to wait."

"Then I fear me I shall not see it, dear friend, for I am very weak to-day."

If I had sought to hide the real fear that was in me, or to hush her forebodings, which I felt to be but too true, it had been mock-

ery at this solemn hour. I took her hand in mine and kissed it, and the tears rushed to my eyes.

"I had a strange waking dream in the night, Mistress Anne," she went on, without seeming to heed me. "I heard my dear father's voice calling me many and many a time, as if in distress, and suddenly I was close beside him. I thought he had forgiven me, and held me in his arms as he used to do when I was a little child, and said that we should part no more."

"It is because your mind has dwelt much on Monsieur le Marquis of late," I answered.

"Perhaps, perhaps; but it was so strangely real, and I cannot turn my thoughts from it. Do you think that he will love me again, when he knows that I am gone, and that he will receive my little child?"

"Sure, sure he will, my love; how could he help it when he sees the winsome thing?"

"Then you will go with her to my father's home, to remain with her and love and protect her until — until —"

"All my life," I cried, taking the sobbing head on my bosom, "until I myself

am taken from her by God's hand. I will follow her wherever her lot is cast, trust me, and be her devoted servant to my life's end. Have you not given her to my care, and who else can love her better?"

The Lady Margaret looked at me gratefully, and from that hour she spoke no more. But there was something in her quiet face that told me she was now at peace. All that day and the night that followed I sat at her bed's foot watching the light die out of that fair young life; and ere the rosy morning of the New Year had dawned upon the sleeping town the Lady Margaret had met her husband in a world where griefs and sorrows are not, and where all is forgotten in the tide of an imperishable love.

I shall not dwell on the sad days that followed, for why should I afflict you with such sad memories, when my purport is only to please you? Yet every tale, as well as every life, has its sad pages; for what is life made of else than tears and smiles? I am not skilled enough in the art of story-writing to know how to leave out the ones

and bring forth the others. All I know is that I am telling you these things in my darling's life just as they happened, and just as I remember them, thanking Heaven all the while that these gloomy days came, as they did, at the beginning of her life, when she was yet too young to know the true sadness of them. Heaven is witness that I speak truly when I say that ever since that day my Maidie has never lacked for the tender love and care of a mother. I was not able to give her much more, but of that she has had a goodly share. Wherefore should I, in my old age, be writing these pages about her else?

A few weeks later, when the first deep loneliness in our little house was softened by the course of time, and my little Lady had ceased to ask after her pretty mamma, I began to think of acquitting myself of my promise to the Lady Margaret, and taking my little one to far-away Provence, and wondering much how the thing might be brought about. For I was little used to the ways of taking a long journey and going about into foreign lands, — I who had scarcely ever gone farther

than our neighboring town. David and I held many a long converse on the subject, and pondered over it, and came to no understanding, till at last we thought of consulting the parson, who was in the habit of going to London once a year, and who was doubtless the most likely body to give advice in such a matter. But ere we had time to follow out this plan, the thing was settled for us in this wise.

One morning — it must have been two months after my writing of the letter to Monsieur de Saint-Rambert, we had an unexpected visitor, a kindly-looking French gentleman, who bespoke himself Monsieur le Marquis's friend. He brought a letter with him, a large square letter with a dark seal bearing the arms of Saint-Rambert upon it. Ah me! it was the very thing that my poor Lady had longed and pined to see, and now that she was gone, it was come to her, just as she had said! — not only the word of forgiveness from her father, but a welcome to her and her little one to come to him and be comforted. Yes, all that I had so often said to soothe her and give her hope was come

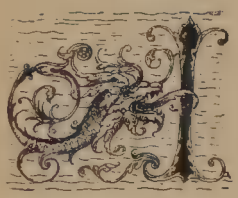
to pass, and she was not there to be made happy by it. This good gentleman, whom I was as pleased to see as though he had been my own kindred, seemed deeply touched by all I told him of the Lady Margaret, and his honest eyes were moist when I had done. Then I learned from him that my Lady's letter written so long since had never reached Monsieur le Marquis, and that mine had found him in a wretched state. For he had been growing old and weak in his last years of loneliness, and his spirit and pride were quite broken. I heard how long he had held out against his daughter, knowing nothing of her trouble, until he learned of it from me, and being himself weak and ill at the time, it had suddenly softened his heart toward her, and he had sent his trusted friend to bring her and her little one to him without an hour's delay. And, lo! now that his anger had vanished, after all this time of wretched waiting, and he repented him of his hardness to his only child, the message came too late! Ah, 't is so often the way of men, to repent them when the time for repentance is past!

I wept bitterly at the thought of it, and marvelled at the strange rule of Providence, which is so far beyond our understanding. Yet I was thankful that the right thing was done at last by my little Lady, and that she would now be taken to her mother's country, which had been that poor lady's last wish, and that she would find her place in the beautiful home which was rightly hers, instead of sharing the humble fortunes of poor folk like David and me. I would go with her, as I had promised her young mother; for how could I part from the lovely child who had already learned to love me, as no child had ever done? I had been born and bred in Wolverton, but I would gladly leave my little town, aye, my home, and even my dear David, to follow my loving duty, and be with my darling if she needed me in what seemed to be the coming of such fair fortunes for her.

So we made ready in great haste for the long journey before us, and in less than a fortnight we were off for the sunny skies of France. This I did, much to my own surprise, be it said, for I was like one in a dream with

going so suddenly from one country to another, — I who had never dreamed that it should be my lot to see so much of the world. I was like a plant out of its native soil, and felt so for many days thereafter. But that is neither here nor there, since in these long years I have learned to love this fair country as well as ever I loved my own England; and this you will deem no treason, if once you look upon that radiant piece of earth which is called Provence.

CHAPTER VII.



REMEMBER not now how many days we were on our way to Southern France ere we reached the gray old walls of Avignon; but it seemed a great while to me, who had never before conceived that the world was so big a place. I felt, long before we touched our journey's end, that we must surely be coming back to our place of starting, having learned once on a day that the world was like a round ball, on which folk could go only so far, travel as much as they would. It was a venturesome thing for one like me to go such a distance into foreign lands, among strangers, and put half a continent and a goodly body of water between one's self and one's own home nest. But I thought not of all this, being younger in those days, and finding such sweet pleas-

ure in serving my little Lady. With Monsieur le Marquis's kind friend to look after us and to instruct me in my unaccustomed duties, everything went smoothly on, and I scarce had time to realize what had happened to us, till it was all over like a dream.

Now, my Lady was in perfect ecstasy the livelong day at all the new things she saw, and her cheeks were so rosy, and her eyes so much aglow with the fire of young excitement, that folk passing us on the way turned round to look at her, and marvelled at her beauty. Her little tongue was never more at rest than the leaves of an aspen-tree, for asking me questions which I was unable to answer for their being too numerous, and likewise about things so far beyond my comprehension. She was now just turned five years that autumn, and I had never seen her like for a wide-awake, inquiring little body. I was at my wit's end trying to find answers and reasons for all her queries, and she was not easily satisfied. I was all the more anxious to teach her to come to me with her little thoughts and needs, now that she was so soon to be surrounded by others who had better

claims to her affection; jealous, perhaps, of her young love, now that she had belonged to me alone these past years, and loath to part with but the smallest share of it.

I knew that Monsieur le Marquis would be pleased and proud of his little granddaughter when once he looked upon her, and that she would fill her mother's place in the old gentleman's heart and forgiveness. My mind was much at work with wondering how it would be for us at the new home; how Monsieur le Marquis would receive me when he learned fully all I was responsible for, and my one hope was that he would not part me from my darling.

At length we were in Provence, — Provence, with its rich olive-groves and towering palms, its wealth of golden fruit, its green-clad mountains, and flood of warm sunlight to gladden those who come from lands where ice and snows are the only things that greet one at midwinter. Laughing with flowers, breathing forth the rich tropical perfume of the wild lemon blossoms, exulting in its own warmth and beauty, such was Provence when first I stepped upon its genial soil,

and thus will I remember it to the last day of my living under its sunny skies. It was like entering an earthly paradise, and each new breath I drew seemed to fill me with a sweet happiness, and drove away even the recollection of sad thoughts; for I do think, now I have lived here so long, that the air of southern countries makes the heart gayer and warmer, and therefore more genial. The bright blue skies overhead with only faint summer clouds floating across them, the warm glow of a February sun, the comfortable, contented look of the brown goats browsing on the hill-slopes, all made me wonder how those who were born in such a fair country could ever look up to other skies and be happy!

In the midst of this perpetual loveliness and wealth of nature's sweetest gifts, the old Château of Saint-Rambert, with gray ivy-grown walls, rose like a hoary giant from out the surrounding verdure. Its windows and stone balconies were screened with blushing roses and flowering eglantine, and its high tower and slender gables looked down with stately grace upon the fertile

"The old Château of Saint-Rambert."

slopes beyond. It seemed to me a veritable enchanted palace, that awaited only the coming of some fair princess to wake it from its gray slumber into life. The thought came to me that my little Lady must be that princess; that surely light and happiness would be restored to that noble house when once her childish voice was heard ringing within it, and her little feet had crossed its threshold. I had not quite outgrown all my romantic spirit, for all David's talk, and I have come to think, in these late years, that I am growing worse instead of better; for I was ever looking forward to something wondrous happening, the like of which we read in fairy-books in our young days, and all manner of foolish hopes passed through my brain as we neared the old château, never thinking, Heaven forgive me, of poor Monsieur le Marquis who at that hour was very low and feeble.

We turned into a long and shady avenue, and very soon after the horses stopped in front of the great stone steps of the château. My heart began to beat with timidity as I ascended, like one who is unaccustomed to

finding himself in strange places. It was near sun-down, and my little Lady, weary with the long drive, and lulled by the scent of this fresh new air, had fallen fast asleep in my arms. They carried her in without waking her, and in the entrance hall I was met by a sweet-faced lady with snow-white hair, whose kindly look at my darling won me. She was a relative of Monsieur le Marquis, who lived near by at the Dépendance, and who had been the only one near him during his illness. She told me hastily of Monsieur de Saint-Rambert's low state. He was taken ill suddenly, and was growing worse very fast; he had not spoken for several days, seeming too weak to do so; but they had hoped that the sight of his daughter would give him strength to speak out something that was preying on his mind, and which caused him great unrest.

How should we break to him the sad news about the Lady Margaret? Would he guess the truth when he saw me with the child in my arms? I hoped he would. But I felt that this was a terrible hour, and that the hand of Providence was in it. We

hurried to his bed-chamber, and it was as I had thought. There was no need of words. Monsieur le Marquis set his eyes upon me, and he knew; the look of anxiousness changed to one of despair; he made great effort to speak, but the words would not come. Then I knelt beside him, and, guessing that he wished to hear something of the Lady Margaret, I told him how she had left us with only messages of love for him, and the hope that he would forgive her and learn to love her little child. Then Monsieur le Marquis kissed the little one, who was still sleeping in my arms, and raised his hands to heaven despairingly, while we could do naught to guess his wish or to help him. Ah, if I had but known what it was he wished to say ere he closed his eyes in eternal sleep! But Heaven willed it not so, for every deed of pride or anger or injustice must surely bring its own penalty.

It is a pitiful thing, indeed, that a man's angry pride should lead him to deeds he can never undo! But pride in some natures is stronger than any other feeling,

stronger than the duties owed to one's kindred and one's God. It may be a righteous thing in the eyes of them that feel the magnitude of high birth and noble rank; but if a man's heart must needs be turned to stone for the sake of them, then I thank Heaven that these days of timely changes are come upon us, when a great name and noble lineage do count for naught if a man's heart be not in the right place and his deeds according.

The next morning, when my little Lady awoke in her strange home, Monsieur le Marquis had passed away, and she was left as good as kinless in the world. For Madame de Vallance, the kindly lady who had greeted us on our arrival at the château, was only related by wedlock to Monsieur le Marquis, and had not even known my darling's mother. She had but lately come to Provence, at Monsieur de Saint-Rambert's bidding, to care for the young Monsieur Philippe, the son of the old Marquis's youngest brother. This little lad, now my Maidie's only kin, and the only one left bearing the name of Saint-Rambert, being

scarce more than a twelvemonth older than my little Lady, there was scant help or protection to be had from him for many years to come, whatever he might prove to do later.

His father and Monsieur le Marquis had not been o'er loving as brothers, partly by reason of the great disparity in their ages, and, too, because the younger Monsieur de Saint-Rambert had been a bit wild and too reckless of his noble brother's sage advice. But he had died in his country's service a short time since; and this to Monsieur le Marquis was atonement for many wrongs, who held his love of country above every other love, and recognized the sacrifice. So he had taken the little orphan son, and vowed to be a father to him as long as his own life was spared.

Thus it happened that the little Philippe, like all the well-born children of Provence, was, during his babyhood, brought up at the large Dépendance on Monsieur le Marquis's lands, which is very near to the great château. Here he enjoyed the sweet country air and wholesome farm-life which

gives strength and vigor to little people, and puts such warmth of color into their baby cheeks. Here Madame came to live with and educate the young master of Saint-Rambert; for she had been chosen by the Marquis because of her high birth and great learning, that she might teach him early how to be worthy of the great name he bore. Poor Monsieur le Marquis! He did so cherish his old ideas. At his time of life he could not foresee what would be the change in his country a quarter of a century later. All the war and tumult he had witnessed in his own day would not make him believe that at that very hour a mighty arm was slowly rising in the midst of the great struggle to strike down the old pride of France, and to make itself the master of an admiring world. He could not realize that another age was at hand, an age of spirited and soaring ambitions that opened to all the road to glorious deeds. It was well he did not see the crumbling of all his hopes and the strange fulfilment of his vague fears.

Some weeks passed ere I learned for cer-

tain what was to become of my little Lady and me, during which time we grew better acquainted with our new surroundings, and learned to love the beautiful home of which I had so often heard the Lady Margaret speak. It was all and more than I had pictured in my mind; so grand and stately in its towering height, so gray and venerable amid the sunlit smiling landscape, so rich in luxury and comforts, that I wondered not she had remembered it tenderly, and hoped that her little child might some day find her place in it.

Monsieur le Marquis's will was opened and read in course of time; and what was not my grief and confusion when I learned that in the will there was no mention of the daughter whom he had so loved, and who had ever been a comfort to him, until the fatal day when he had stood immovable between her and her heart's love. No mention of the only child born to him, — the most deserving and lovable of daughters, to my unwitting mind! For the will had been made when Monsieur le Marquis was still full of revengeful bitterness against the

Lady Margaret, and the thought of reconciliation seemed a thing impossible. Then it came over me suddenly, like a sickening revelation, that it was this which Monsieur le Marquis had striven so piteously to say that night when I came to him with my little Lady. I knew that in that hour all bitterness had melted from his heart, and that his only thought was to right the wrong he had done her. But in just punishment of his angry act, when that moment came, Heaven had refused him the power to show his repentance, and the words froze on his lips as cruelly as they were sealed in that fatal testament. The Château of Saint-Rambert, his lands, his name, and all his possessions, even his fatherly love, were given to the young Philippe, and my darling was left without recognition in her mother's country.

Heaven forgive me for the thoughts that came to me when I fully comprehended the greatness of this injustice. If one can bear malice in one's heart towards an innocent unoffending babe, I did towards that dear little Philippe; that he should thus step into

my darling's place, that all her rights should be set aside in his favor, when I knew in my soul that Monsieur le Marquis's last wish had been to cancel every word in that same will, and only the words to frame this wish had been lacking to him. Ah me! I wondered what had been the worth of my long errand, and why we had left our little home in England to come here and find my little one with no claim in her mother's home!

True, there were endless lawyers and executors and plenty of them, who were greatly concerned in the matter, and to no purpose, as far as I could see, since with all their talking they could not change a word of what was in Monsieur le Marquis's will; men who talked a deal too much, to my mind, and accomplished nothing. But that was their business, it seemed, and they were artful at it. They tried hard to convince me of something, I know not what, — perhaps that I was not myself, but some one else; and they might have done it if I had listened to them long enough. But this they said, for which I thought the better of them, that I

need give myself no fears about my little Lady; for, trusting to the future generosity of the young master of Saint-Rambert, they had arranged that she should not be without a home, but well cared for, as became her rank. Now, while I was eased of much anxiety by this, I could not help feeling, for many a day thereafter, that Monsieur Philippe was a little impostor, and that I could never bear to look upon him kindly, nor have my darling learn to love him, even though he was her only kindred. But she did learn to care for him, in spite of all this, — oh, bless you, yes, — and he for her, and I was the last to disapprove of it; for we soon forgot and never but once had cause to remember that Monsieur Philippe was the master of Saint-Rambert.

CHAPTER VIII.

IN due time Monsieur le Marquis's affairs were settled to the exceeding satisfaction of all the executors, though not wholly to mine; and the kindly gentleman who had travelled with us to Provence and who was chief among them, came himself to tell me the result, which was that my Lady would have the large Dépendance for her home, until the young Marquis came to his majority, when he, being the master of all the lands of Saint-Rambert, would do his own will about them, and, it was hoped, might wish to do better by his cousin. And, best of all, I was allowed to stay with her, to serve and care for her, — which was wellnigh a necessity, as she would go to no one else. So it was that Monsieur Philippe took

my darling's place, and went to live with Madame at the château. It was not what I had hoped for her, but it was far better than that she should be left entirely without recognition in her grandfather's home; and while I endeavored to be thankful for all that was done for the child, I could not but sigh inwardly at the mockery of fate, and make mental note of all I should write to David upon the matter.

In the mean while, however, and ere I had the leisure to collect my feelings for a long narrative of all our doings to dear David, we felt quite at home in our pretty little dwelling, and my darling and I were as happy in it as if we had never seen the great château hard by. It is true that the large Dépendance was far from being a modest country farmhouse like ours at Wolverton. It was rather a sumptuous country home, well stocked with the comforts of the farm and dairy, and with many of the luxuries of living, which made it a fit home for any well-born child. Not half a league away from the château, it seemed to catch some of the splendor of the great house, without any

of its severe magnificence. For it stood, not like the château on a towering eminence, but nestling in the lap of a sloping hill, well sheltered by its mass of trees, its red roofs peeping out here and there among the dense foliage, with such a hospitable sort of look that it was ever a pleasure to the eye, and had always about it something that bespoke a cheery welcome. From the first time we entered it to this very day, my Lady has loved every nook and corner of it, every tree that casts its cool shadow over it, every flower that turns up its pretty face to it, every bird that pours out its sweet note to make it merry. She has never sighed for the richness at the great château beyond; she has grown up a simple maiden, with simple tastes and pleasures, as became her altered fortunes. Even in later years, when she was told of the change that had come into her life, she never grieved over it a moment, but scolded me rather for having done so in her behalf, saying she could not be otherwise than happy whilst she had her old Mistress Anne to love her.

As for me, my life had no other thought

or purpose than my darling's happiness. To see her growing beneath my care, like a fair young flower, more beautiful with each day's sunshine; to hear her merry laughter through the house, and to know that she loved me first and most of all, — was recompense, in truth.

Before many days, Madame de Vallance came to pay us a visit, and brought with her the little Marquis, that he might become acquainted with his cousin. It was the first time the children had met, and I remember feeling a little tremor as I led my Lady in by the hand to make her courtesy, wondering what manner of child the young master might prove to be, and whether my Lady would make friends with him; for she had never been with other children, and I knew not what she might take it into her little head to do. To my great relief, she smiled graciously at her new relatives, and went straight to Madame to be kissed.

"Ah, what an amiable little one!" exclaimed the lady, well pleased at this mark of confidence. "You are our little Llora now, and this is your cousin Philippe. Will you not greet him too?"

My Lady did as she was bidden, with pretty innocence; and then Madame took her on her knees and stroked her bright hair gently. Maidie looked up at her with wondrous interest; for Madame was a lady whom every one admired and loved, and children most of all. Her quiet voice and serene look, her gentle ways, won their hearts immediately. She was not old in spite of her silvery hairs; her face was still young and even beautiful, with a something in it that showed she had once been haughty. But she had known great troubles and losses in her lifetime, and these had made of her a sweet and sympathetic woman.

Monsieur Philippe was a handsome boy with a fine open face, and eyes as blue as my Maidie's, for which I became fond of him on the spot, forgetting all my former resolutions to the contrary. Scarce more than a year my Lady's elder was he, and yet a manly little fellow for his age; and many of my fears were set at rest as I learned to know him better, — for if I mistook not my power of judging a heart through a pair of eyes, I had nothing but good to hope of him.

But with him was another child whose looks I did not like quite so well; a playfellow of the little Marquis, not so much a child in face as in size. I knew the moment I set eyes on the two that he was master of Monsieur Philippe, and was a little tyrant withal. His face told it. I never knew eyes like his to presage any good in man or child, — of a dark, uncertain color, and close to one another, like companions leagued in mischief; thick reddish hair, which to my judging ever means an evil temper, itself the mark of persons of low degree; a sharp pointed nose that gave promise of looking a bit too far into other people's matters; a thin mouth, curling contemptuously at the corners, and great weakness about the chin. But the younger lad had conceived a strange liking for him, perhaps because of the very difference in their natures. All that François did was wondrous in Monsieur Philippe's eyes, and, boy-like, he admired most what was most reprehensible in him. But you will learn more of Monsieur François in time.

I sat thinking all this to myself, while Madame entertained me in her kindly way

about her young charge, saying I must bring the little girl often to the château, that they might grow to know and love each other, and dwelling much on the many pleasant things about our own house and surroundings, where she and the boy had lived for a number of years, that I might not feel too keenly disappointed of my Lady's fortunes. She told me how she herself had come to Provence, after her own great losses, to bring up the orphan boy who was to be made the heir of Saint-Rambert, according to Monsieur le Marquis's request. She spoke much of that good gentleman, of his lonely life since his return to Provence; and by the time she had finished her story, the three children were out in the old garden, playing and laughing together as if they had been friends always, for both the lads knew the place well, and Monsieur Philippe felt more at home here than at the grand château.

So after that day there was scarcely a time when the three were not together. Such games of romp and hide-and-seek as we had in the old house; it was here we held our finest frolics, for at the château we all

felt that we must be on our best behavior. When the days were fine, the lads climbed the trees in the woods for nuts, and my Lady gathered them all into her little basket; or else they rode up the lovely white mountain roads on their little mulets, with Julien, the stable-boy, to lead them. When it was stormy, there were things a-plenty indoors to amuse them: the old garret with its enticing chests full of knick-knacks and curious playthings brought hither from the château, and which had doubtless been the delight of some grandparent's childhood; some ill-atuned hunting-horns, which were the affliction of my too sensitive ears, and the joy of my young master's heart, — for if there was one thing Monsieur Philippe liked above all others, it was to make a good wholesome noise. Then there were quaint gowns and old frippery in which my Lady loved to attire herself and to strut up and down like a gorgeous peacock with feathers outspread, to be admired of her two companions. Master Philippe was ever her veriest slave, and paid her all the court she loved; but from the very first François took delight in teasing

and thwarting her, calling her an ugly cockatoo when she fancied herself most beautiful, pulling her hair slyly or disarranging her grand coiffure, stepping upon her long train purposely, and doing a multitude of like tricks to warm my little Lady's temper. Other times they sat around me before the crackling fire, roasting the brown marons, while I told them some stories of Old England, which always delighted them, until the big yellow coach from Saint-Rambert came to take the young Marquis back to the château.

Those were happy times, indeed, which made me well-nigh forget all my old disappointment, and which lasted not half long enough, for children have such a way of shooting up, like young daffodils, — to-day a bud, to-morrow a flower, — that before I was well aware of it, my Lady was going over to the château every day or so to study lessons out of books with Monsieur Philippe; for they were both so near the same age, and she so quick and bright at learning, that they kept pace together very well. She was always fond of going to the château. Every-

thing there had its own particular charm for her; the great high tower, the graceful turrets, the spacious rooms and brilliant halls, the wondrously decorated ceilings, and walls hung with gay-colored portraits of her own high-born ancestors, — all was a source of ever new surprise and delight to her.

But there was one thing at the château that pleased her above all else, and made her wonder and ask questions that were unanswerable, and that was the bold device of the Saint-Rambert Arms which stands above the chimney-piece in the great entrance hall. It is truly a noble escutcheon, full of curious imaginings and flaming colors, and of enormous size. In one corner a fierce black winged creature, with pinions and tail outspread, seeming to fly upon a sky of gold; in another corner, an uplifted standard with the purple and white fleur-de-lis upon it, guarded by a rampant lion; in a lower dexter, the head of an Alpine chamois, with horns of immeasurable length; while in the last dexter, a wreath of flowering olive lies upon a field of blue. Then below, in graceful festoonings, is a band of red with the

The Saint-Rambert Arms.

words inscribed upon it in letters of glittering gold, AMOR VINCIT OMNIA.

From the time my Lady first noticed anything at the château, she seemed bewitched by this gay scroll. She would climb upon a chair and stare at it untiringly, with wonder in her round eyes. By and by she began to make out the letters, and treasured them in her little head, that she might ask and learn their meaning. One evening, I remember, she sat beside me while I was busy with my needle, and related to me the happenings of the day, as she was wont to do when she went to the château; what she had learned and done, and how Madame had told her that the bright gold letters which she so loved signified "Love conquers all things."

"And now what is Love, Mistress Anne, that it can conquer all things?" she asked in her eager way, whisking her yellow curls and looking at me with daring innocence.

What could I tell her!

"Love, love," said I, "why, something that makes mischief ofttimes," I answered

dodgingly, "and you will learn about it soon enough."

Then she looked up at me again with that witching little twist of her head, and cocking her saucy chin to one side, said, "What can it do, Mistress Anne? tell me, what can it do?"

Ah, saints, what had it done for me!

"Many things, my sweet, which you will learn when you are older grown."

"Have you ever had love," she persisted, "and is it so good a thing to have?" and she threw both her hands into my lap, and pulled at my kerchief to urge me to be more conversant on her favorite subject. But as she did so, my box of beads in some way got overturned, and all the little pearls fell to the ground with a merry tinkle, as though laughing at us; and the next instant, my Lady was down upon her hands and knees, her yellow curls hiding her face, bent on picking up every scattered bead, and forgetting for the moment all about love and the witchery of those wondrous words when seen amid bright colors athwart a great coat of arms.

But, bless you, she spoke and thought of it again many, many times, whenever she looked at the gay motto, and later still, when she learned for herself, better than I could tell her, the true meaning of its words.

CHAPTER IX.

E were now in the month of December, the time when great rains and storms happen, and the northwest wind sweeps down like a scourge upon the fair plains of Provence. My darling had always a great fear of the wind. She pictured it in her young mind as some angry giant-bird swooping over the country with flapping wings, beating down and destroying everything in its way. The dismal sound of it moaning through the trees or whistling furiously down the chimneys and gables always sent her running to me to hide her head in my apron, or cover up her ears. I recall now one day such a storm we had that at high noon we were obliged to light the candles; the eaves all round the house ran like

young streams, and every chick outside was drenched to the bone. Monsieur Philippe and his friend François had just come in, being on their way a-rabbit hunting when the storm had overtaken them. I stood with the three children at one of the diamond casements which look down into the garden, watching the heavy drops that fell. The frightened birds flew after each other with sharp, shrill cries; the trees swayed their tall tops, and tossed their branches to and fro, like things writhing in agony. My Lady trembled at the sight, and yet was so fascinated by it that I could not get her away.

"Oh, Mistress Anne," cried she, clasping her hands, "do you not think it hurts the trees to be beaten so by the cruel wind? Oh, dear, I know it hurts them! See, this little one near is bent almost to the ground, and its branches seem to be weeping."

"What a strange fancy, little Maid!" I said, drawing her closer to me, and making light of her terror. But even as I spoke, one of those very branches came lashing past us, leaving its tears upon the window-pane, so that my Lady started back as if

she had been struck. François gave a great laugh; but Monsieur Philippe came around to comfort her, while I strove to convince her that the trees felt no pain, but rather enjoyed the wind and rain, this being the way of trees of showing their delight.

"And the poor little birds that live in the branches, Mistress Anne, what do they do when the thunder and the lightning come?"

"They hide themselves under one another's wings close in their nests, and the good God cares for them, so that no harm comes to them," said I.

My Lady was beginning to feel reassured by my words, when suddenly a most dismal howling, the like of which I ne'er had heard from man or beast, sounded from without, and made us all stop to listen. I went to the door to see what the matter might be, the two lads running on ahead, while the howling still continued, with now and then the sharp sound of a blow and the angry tones of a man's voice mingled with the raging of the storm.

Ere I had reached the door Monsieur Philippe had crossed the garden path, and stood in the middle of the road, his hand-

some legs deep in rain and mud, holding words with an ill-looking country lout about a miserable dog that lay in the way, moaning piteously, and panting with exhaustion. For he had been harnessed, after the fashion of peasants' dogs, to a cart twice his own size, and loaded heavily with fagots and logs of wood. The up-road over the hill was steep and slippery, and the poor beast had finally sunk beneath the burden, while his lazy taskmaster urged him on with oaths and jeers and frequent cuts from his knotty hickory-stick.

My young master was but a lad then, scarce more than nine years, but he was very tall for his age, and all the country folk knew him for the Marquis of Saint-Rambert. When the fellow had recognized him, he took on a slinking, guilty look, making excuse for himself with saying that the dog was but a lazy beast, and of no good to him.

"Lazy, indeed! I should call thee the lazy one," said my young Marquis, warmly. "Thy shoulders are strong and broad enough to carry the wood, and the dog, too, for that matter."

"Aye, aye, my young Monsieur, it is a worthless beast, and good for nothing but to eat all I have."

"Then will I rid thee of the dog. Cut the leather with thy knife and loose him, since he is of no use to thee."

"Oh, truly, my excellent master, I could not part with him; he 's a valuable beast for all that," said the rascal, suddenly viewing the creature with new favor, but still preparing to obey Monsieur Philippe with some show at hesitation. "He 's unruly, to be sure, but I 'm attached to him. He 's young yet, and I must train him for labor;" and he gave the animal a fond twist of the ear that caused him to renew his lamentations.

"What wilt thou have for the dog?" asked the young Marquis, laying hold of him.

"It 's a valuable beast," repeated the ruffian, "and I 'm fond of him, but I 'll trust to my young master's generosity."

The dog already began to wag his drooping tail, and to sidle along towards Monsieur Philippe, seeming to understand that a bargain was being made in his behalf, and look-

ing his utmost to convince his deliverer that he could be more prepossessing under favorable circumstances.

"A half-louis, then," said Philippe, drawing the small gold coin from his pocket.

The owner of the dog stared at it in amaze, and raised his dripping cap a dozen times in acknowledgment, and then pulled off his load of wood as lightly as you please, albeit with a look of satisfaction lurking in his small eyes, while the lads came indoors with the dog following close upon my young master's heels.

"He is an ugly dog enough," said François, giving him a sly kick, which I saw, as soon as they were all in the house, "and not worth half the money. I could have got you one for nothing."

"I did not want the dog, François, as much as to get him away from that brutal fellow; but he is not so ill-looking. See, he has fine ears and a nice muzzle."

Monsieur Philippe was right; Master Lion was not at all an ill-looking dog, for when we got him washed a bit of his mud, and dried before the open fire, and his shaggy

coat nicely brushed, he proved, on the contrary, a very handsome animal. My Lady was the first to welcome him, putting both her arms about his neck, and calling him a poor, dear doggie, and a lovely doggie, over and over. She would be the first one to feed him, and her fear of the storm without was forgotten in the excitement caused by this new-comer. He was a young dog, but tremendous for his age, as his kind are apt to be, and full of youthful pranks and spirits. As soon as he recovered from his great surprise at finding himself so comfortable, he waxed very jubilant, utterly forgetting his sad past, and manifesting his contentment in joyful barks and waggings of his tail, which amused my Lady exceedingly. And I am sure that if any one had asked Master Lion what was his idea of paradise, he would have said with his big eyes, a cheerful fire on a wet day, a soft white rug to lie on, a sumptuous plate of soup, and two kind children like my Lady and her cousin to play with him.

Long before the day of my first acquaintance with Master Lion, I had come to con-

sider a dog the paragon of all intelligence, and be it said to his praise, he went far to hold me in that belief. I have known creatures with more brain and fewer feet to be less wise than he; and many a human friend might have proved less grateful than was Master Lion to my darling and Monsieur Philippe. The first inkling I had of what a power of wit there was in that big head of his was that, keeping in mind his first gracious greeting from Monsieur François, he growled at him whenever the elder lad came too close to him in their play. From the other two he would stand anything, even to being plagued nigh unto death with my Lady's combing and plaiting his "curls," as she called them, to make him curlier and woollier than ever. He understood perfectly that the two cousins loved each other, and served them both with equal devotion. But François was a foreign element which he could never reconcile in his own mind; for dogs have a way all their own of finding out the good and bad in folk.

We grew very fond of Master Lion, as well we might; for what with his new sur-

roundings, living in elegance at the château, and being Monsieur Philippe's special pet, he took on such an air of well-breeding that he proved his former master's words, that he was a valuable dog. From the château to the farm and back from the farm to the château he travelled daily, — sometimes as company for the children ; sometimes alone, with a message to me from Madame ; sometimes with some dainty morsel which my Lady had fashioned with her own hands for Madame and Monsieur Philippe, and which he never so much as peered at on the way, being sure of his reward at the end of the journey.

With Master Lion for a playfellow, there was little peace to be had at our house of a holiday afternoon, for it was here that my young master loved to come for his best frolics, having leave to play and romp to his heart's content. The fighting of bears was one of his chief delights. On rainy or unpleasant days the children would inveigle their good dog upstairs into the big corridor, made dark for the purpose, and Master Lion, being well trained to the game, would

hide behind one of the half-opened doors to await their coming. Then Philippe and my Lady, hand in hand, with ears alert and eyes wide open in the dark like that of young owls, would come tip-toeing down the hall, which they called the way to the Black Cave. There was a deal of uncertainty as to which door the enemy lay behind; for he was as tricky as might be, and bided his chance till they were almost under his very nose, and then he would rush out at them with one of his deep low barks. And when my Lady's clear laughter rang out and echoed through the whole house, I knew for a certainty that they had been trapped by the ferocious beast. Ofttimes the gardener's lads would happen over just in time for the fun; and if the game waxed very exciting, one by one they would go over to Master Lion's side, turning bears themselves, till at last my poor little Lady was left all alone to be devoured. But she would start out again, with all the bravery in the world, while the dutiful bears went back to their dens to await her coming; and when they all sprang out upon her at once, she would run to

me for protection, hide her face in my apron, and laugh.

Thus their childhood passed in wholesome merry-making, with just enough serious duties to make the other hours seem happy; and thus they grew in years, until the time came for putting by all such childish frolic and for thinking of graver things.

CHAPTER X.

ONSIEUR PHILIPPE was the first to bring about a change in the pleasant monotony of our simple lives. As the years followed one another, he grew of an age to be sent away to college to finish his studies, after the fashion of all young noblemen of the day. Then came a time, which to my mind is fraught with tenderest sadness, when the cheery lad, the life and sunshine of the household, goes out from the home nest, as doth a birdling from under the parent wing, and his boyish face returns no more from the years of absence. We all felt this, I think, when our good Monsieur Philippe left us, but more especially Madame de Vallance, who had been a true mother to

him, even as I, in my humble way, had striven to be such to my darling. She loved him exceedingly, in her quiet, silent way, and had been as tender of him as any mother might; while he in turn looked to Madame for his every need as a son, and she and my Maidie were foremost in his affections.

It was about this time that I began to ponder a bit over my young master's fondness for his cousin, for they were both nearing the age when young folk think of tender things, do what you will to prevent them. I was not the one to say them nay, far from it; for to speak without concealment this had been my secret hope for many a day, that their children's friendship would grow in depth and breadth, till, in the rich springtime of their young lives, it blossomed into the fairest flower of human happiness.

Albeit I spoke not of my thoughts to any one; I only wrote of them to David, who, after giving me his best opinion on the matter, made great feint of taunting me upon my ever eager searching after romance. Now, only to prove the artful deception of

even the best of men in such matters, I will mention here, that David was at that very time weaving a romance of his own, all unbeknown to me.

We were, as I have said, nearing the Christmas-tide, — the lovely Christmas-time of roses and lilies, so plentiful in Provence at that season. And it was settled that Monsieur Philippe was to leave us upon the New Year. So against the approaching separation my young Marquis spent more of his time than ever at the farm, if, indeed, that were possible. He had much learned reading to do in preparation, and he brought his great volumes hither, and expounded aloud from them to my Lady, making so free with the pronouncing of certain long words that I marvelled at his glibness, and asked myself what more there was for him to learn even at the great capital of Paris. My darling sat beside him, bending over some tapestry work, and listening to him with pretty interest. It was like a picture to watch them with their young heads together, poring over some difficult question, always in such perfect unity of mind with

each other, agreeing perfectly in all things. I was always pleased when that young François was not with them; for whenever he was about there was discord in the air. I never could be made to see any good in him, nor could I understand why my young Marquis had so long suffered him for a friend. For, meseemed that, growing older, his tongue had waxed sharper in saying ungracious things; and what with my Lady's quick temper and his airs of lording it over her, they had many an outbreak, which Philippe, by his ever peace-loving nature, always managed to appease.

I think it was the day before Christmas that Monsieur Philippe first spoke to my darling of his going away; for though we all knew that it was soon to take place, he could not bear the mentioning of it, being — shall I say it without your thinking less of him for it? — a little tender-hearted at parting from his home and his dear cousin Llora. We had been at the château all day preparing the little chapel for the next day's fête, and in the evening we sat in the grand salon awaiting our cup of hot milk and

At the Harpsichord.

chestnuts which Madame would never let us go without. My darling sat at the old harpsichord singing over some of the Christmas chants which she loved, while Monsieur Philippe stood at her side, feigning much interest in the music, but in reality admiring her Ladyship's pretty airs and graces, as she softly fingered the yellow keys, and chatting with her at propitious intervals. Master Lion lay stretched out on the floor, all his great length, beside them, howling disconsolately, either at not being taken into their confidence, or at the music mayhap, he being much averse to sweet sounds.

"And what shall you do when I am gone, Maidie?" asked Monsieur Philippe, trying to speak of the matter lightly, though I knew it had weighed heavily on his heart of late, and I had seen a moist light gleaming in his eyes once or twice. But it was not the sign of weakness, for Heaven is witness there is none braver than my good young master; it was rather the proof of his strong and tender heart, that he could shed tears at this first youthful pang, and feel no shame of them.

"Oh, Philippe dear, I cannot think of it!" cried my Lady, who, in truth, could ill imagine what home would be without Cousin Philippe. "I shall try to study very hard when you are gone, so that you may not think me too great a simpleton when you return. For you will be so wise and learned by that time that I shall be quite afraid of you."

"Never think that, Maidie, or I 'll remain a pumpkin-head all my life. I would not have you change in your regard for me for all the learning and honors in France! Promise me now that you will not," said the young Marquis, with a look of deep meaning in his eyes. My darling laid her hand gently on his arm, looking at him quite innocently, for there was no hidden meaning in her words. "Dearest Philippe, how could I change toward you save to love you more, if that were possible!"

My lady was too young, too much a child, in spite of her blossoming maidenhood, to see in Philippe aught but a comrade, a brother, who would be always dear to her. Any other love she had never known.

"I will think of you first of all on the fête-days, and when I am very lonely I shall write you long letters of all our doings at home, and tell you how Master Lion behaves himself in your absence," she added, turning to that brave fellow, who still eyed them with the air of one who does not mean to be ignored.

Monsieur Philippe did not say what he would do, but he looked well satisfied, and, passing his arm about my Lady's waist, they walked together the length of the big salon, talking as confidingly as though they had been my Lord and Lady indeed.

The next morning being Christmas Day, my Lady and I having a mind to go to the little chapel for early service, there to greet the village folk, and thence to wish Madame and Monsieur Philippe a merry Christmas, we arose very early. But ere I was well out of bed and dressed, a Christmas greeting came to us from the château. I heard a strange confusing sound at our door, — first a suppressed and muffled bark, and then a mighty scratching and pawing upon the panes, — a noise that makes one's teeth grind.

In a minute more my Lady flew past me down the stairs and opened the door, to receive no less a personage than Master Lion, who bounded in joyfully, at the same time dropping a basketful of fresh pinks and violets at her feet. Then he pranced about her in hilarious delight, stretching his neck to meet her look, brushing his shaggy head against her, and saying plainly with his big eyes, —

"I am a Christmas gift from the château; behold my new badge of servitude!"

Surely enough, there round his neck, glistening through the light brown masses of his shaggy coat, was a shining collar with "My Lady" engraved upon it, and the Saint-Rambert Arms.

My darling uttered a cry of delight, and kissed and hugged the big creature, almost to smothering him.

"You dear, enormous darling!" she repeated over and over; "to think that you should be mine, all my very own! Oh, what a good cousin is Cousin Philippe, is he not, Master Lion? Come, Mistress Anne, and see my beautiful gift. Now we

must hasten to the château to thank my dear Philippe ; " and she whisked her white lace capeline over her pretty head, and, drawing me by the hand and Master Lion by one of his long ears, we started forth in the early gray morning.

To be sure, all that day was a day of merry-making. In the evening we dined at the château ; and the feast was a splendid one in honor of the young master's departure. Such a tremendous brown goose was never seen as the one brought on the table that day ; the creams were never so frothy, the tower-cake never so high, the hot marons never so crisp, and the papillotes never said so many bright, sparkling things. It was a joyful feast ; and every one had his full share of its good things, even Master Lion, who was admitted to the table when dessert time came, and sat so high upon his haunches that his fine muzzle just rested on the white cloth, open, like a trap-door, to receive all the dainties that were offered him.

It was the last Christmas that we spent all together for four long years, as Monsieur

Philippe was not again with us at that season during all his years of college. Within a fortnight he was gone from us, — gone to his new life of serious work, gone to meet the great world, whither he took our heart's blessings with him, and whence the boy Philippe never returned, but a brave-spirited, noble man in his stead.

CHAPTER XI.

I CANNOT tell you how much we all missed Monsieur Philippe. The big château seemed very lonely without its young master; for he was such a happy, wholesome, vigorous lad, with all his gentle nature, that one felt his presence about, even as one feels a sunbeam without being conscious of it. Every one in the town asked after him, — the neighbors, the village-folk, the farmers on his lands, — till I marvelled at the number of his friends. Madame, who felt his absence perhaps more than ourselves, could not bear to remain a day at the château without seeing some one of us, that she might talk of him, of his little sayings and doings, of his many qualities which were well-nigh inexhaustible. Whenever letters came, which they did very

often, both to Madame and to my darling, for my young Marquis was more than dutiful in this respect, we always assembled to read them; even Master Lion joined us, listening intently to every word, with his nose uplifted, as though he knew and understood what it was all about. And they were long letters, full of lively interest about his school life, of the new friends he made, and always closing with some sweet, affectionate words which showed that, however distant he himself might be, his heart dwelt ever with the friends he had left in Provence.

Madame often wept when it came to these places; and my Maidie, who was grown a very daughter in her affections, would console her, speaking of the time when Monsieur Philippe would come home a brave and handsome chevalier.

My Lady looked upon her cousin Philippe as a brother. Dearer or more affectionate a brother could not have been; but I doubt exceedingly if many brothers there were that year at college who received such frequent and entertaining letters from their sisters as did Monsieur le Marquis de

Saint-Rambert, or who, receiving them, treasured them in secret, read them so many times over, and covered them with invisible seals ere they were put away and locked from other eyes.

My darling, as I may have said before, was growing more fair and beautiful with each returning day; the bloom of perfect health and youth was on her cheek; her eyes were dark and liquid and changeful as the sea. Her hair had turned its baby corn-silk hue to a rich chestnut, full of warmth and color, so that when the sun fell upon it, it shone and glittered like burnished gold. She was tall and slender as a lily-stem, graceful as an aspen-bough; her merry laughter was as pure and fresh as the trickling of a mountain streamlet, and her heart as joyous as the note of the thrush. What wonder, then, that my young Marquis should think tender thoughts of her, indeed! that ofttimes, in the maze of some dire geometric problem, instead of the puzzlesome angles, the soft curves of her young features found their way on the learned pages before him! Dear, brave

Philippe, God bless your honest heart, and forgive my jealous old eyes that they had guessed your secret! For from that very hour I loved you even as I love my darling Maidie, and would have given my life to see your happiness fulfilled.

There were others, and plenty, who looked upon my Lady with admiring eyes. There was the old miller, who had ground the Saint-Rambert grains ever since he and the old Marquis had been lads together, and who believed there was not another face like hers, not even among all the madonnas of Provence; and who, on a Sunday morning, would await her at the door of the little chapel, that he might be the first to kiss her hand as she went in to service. Nor was he the only one; for my Lady was known to all the country folk and to the poor and sickly as a bright angel of mercy who was ever busy with some charity for them, and whose cheery looks and words fed their hungry hearts as much as her savory morsels fed their hungry bodies. For she was a true daughter of Provence, quick of sympathy,

impetuous, and generous as the warm sun-rays of that good country. It made my heart glad whenever I witnessed any tribute of their respect; for I would have every thing and creature near love her as she deserved to be loved, that she might never know aught but love.

Still, there was one whose sidelong glances and honeyed speeches were admiration of such a sort that it disturbed me more than I cared to say. Monsieur François had not been slow to take notice of all my Lady's charms, and though she had never shown any liking for him, he seemed to take it as his title, that she should favor him — Heaven alone knows for what reason — with her regard. True, he had often been their companion, when children; but it had been Monsieur Philippe's choice. François was no more their equal in nature than he was in station. He and his mother came to Provence, I know not whence, and had, ever since I knew aught of them, received favors and bounties from the Marquis's family. Moreover, he had gained my young master's

friendship in some mysterious way, and Philippe could see no wrong in him, simply because he could not think evil of any one.

Monsieur François had taking to coming to the farm some time after the young Marquis's departure with familiar and unwelcome frequency. I was not overgracious to him, and Maidie would as likely as not leave him in the middle of some maudlin speech to go and trim her border of spicy pinks in the garden. But he would follow her with his tantalizing air of patronage, flaunting his irksome admiration at her the more she showed herself indifferent or vexed.

One day — it must have been a twelvemonth or more since my young Marquis had left us, for the olive and lemon trees were just turning white with blossoms, and the wood-flowers thrusting their shy heads from between the moss-grown rocks — my Lady started out upon some errand of mercy among the village people, her little basket, filled with dainty sweet-bits, upon her arm, and accompanied by her faithful friend and follower Master Lion, who for a long time now had been her

"My Lady out upon some errand of mercy."

only play-fellow. She was just turned seventeen that Easter, and uncommon tall and maidenly for her age. I could not help looking out after her as she tripped lightly down the green valley, in her pure white gown, and bright hues in her cheeks and eyes. She seemed the very spirit of the young spring-time.

She was going to see Mère Toinette, I think she said, — an old dame who was a kind of favorite with my Lady, who seemed to find endless entertainment in her visits thither. For Mère Toinette had a real talent for bewitching young folk. She was the picture of mystery; withered and wrinkled and bent was she, with never a tooth in her head. She looked a hundred years old. No one in the village had ever seen her look younger, and some thought that she would go on living and mumbling forever. But every one believed in her great wisdom: harvesters went to her to know of their crops, and she prophesied for them; young lovers went to her in their troubles, and she spake to them as a very oracle, never swerving from the truth. She had ever bespoken

gentle and happy fortunes for my Lady, many friends, a deal of happiness in wedlock, a handsome husband, and the like, at which my Maidie always laughed heartily, never having yet dreamed of such things.

Now, on this very morning, as she was coming out of the old woman's hut, her face all smiles still at Mère Toinette's foolery, who should come sidling up to her and take her arm but Monsieur François, with his weak smile and fawning look? My Lady gave a little start, as much from displeasure as from surprise; while Master Lion, with his usual presence of mind, growled at him ferociously, and wedged himself so skilfully between his young mistress and the intruder that the latter reeled a bit ere he recovered his balance, while she remained untouched.

"Ah, Mistress Llora," he said, with his sleek impudence, — no one ever called her so but him, — "you seem to be in league against me, of late, with that great ugly brute of yours. Why do you run away, my fair one? Can you not see that I am dying of love for you?" he added, with an attempt at coming

near to her on the other side, but being speedily repressed by the "ugly brute."

"Do not talk foolishly to me, François," said my Lady, walking faster; "you know very well that I do not like you, and I like you still less when you speak ill of my good dog."

"Say that you will like me more if I speak well of him, dear angel!" and he tried to lay his hand on Master Lion, who snapped at him as though he had been stung by a bumble-bee.

"That I cannot," returned my Lady; "but it matters little to me or the dog what you think of us."

"Ah, how cruel are your words!" continued he. "I should think seriously of throwing myself over the Rhone bridge, if I thought you meant them; but I know your sex too well for that. You say one thing and think another; it is ever so in love."

"I speak the truth, Monsieur François, I would have you know it," said my Lady, with an angry blue flame flashing in her eyes; and in turning hastily from him one of the flowers from her basket fell to the ground.

He flung himself after it, carrying it to his lips and looking at her in a way that made him more loathsome every minute. "I have something very sweet to tell you," he said, after a moment's pause; "will you listen to it?"

"I will not," said my Lady.

"You must, you shall," he cried, after the manner of stage-actors, and took her little cold hand in his; but only for a quarter of a second, for Master Lion again put him at bay. "I love you," he said; "I love you more than any one else ever will. I wish you to be my wife. Do not say no yet; think awhile, think of your happiness, of—"

My Lady interrupted him. "If to become your wife means that I should have to be near you, to look upon you for a whole lifetime, then I should rather die than call this happiness; for I hate you!"

"No, you do not, my handsome, angry goddess. I do not mind your pride; it is wondrously becoming now, but remember who you are,—the child of a disinherited daughter, yourself the daughter of a commoner. Nay, nay, do not bite your pretty

lips, you will make them bleed. Every one knows the story. You are alone in the world, without friends, without dowry, living on the bounty of Monsieur le Marquis; you could do worse than marry me."

"Without friends!" cried my Lady. "How dare you! Is not my cousin Philippe my friend and my protector, and the noblest lad that ever took so cowardly a one as you for friend! It is your treachery and ingratitude to him that makes you say it."

"Ha, ha, ha, my cousin Philippe, indeed!" laughed Monsieur François, sneeringly. "Perhaps you are looking to Monsieur Philippe for your future happiness. Madame la Marquis de Saint-Rambert would not sound ill, in truth. It is easy to love one's cousin when that cousin is the marquis of a great estate. But never fear, my haughty young peacock, Monsieur de Saint-Rambert has other game in view, — of richer plumage than your own. Let us part now; I see you are unduly excited. You will perhaps think better of my offer when you are calm."

The black-hearted villain! A villain I always felt he was by nature, and but that this

had been so trying an hour to my dear girl, I had been glad of this chance to prove it.

She stood and looked at him a minute, with fixed eyes, and cheeks burning with shame; the feelings in her made so conflicting by his cowardly words that she scarce knew herself. Her anger and shame at having been accused of like base thoughts towards her noble and generous cousin, the contempt she felt for this faithless, snake-tongued creature before her, threw her into a state of agitation nigh unto frenzy. She turned her eyes upon Master Lion, who, scenting a power of mischief in the air, had been on the alert for a word from my Lady. But she did not speak; she only looked at him mutely, appealingly, and that look said, —

"Have you heard him, my good Lion, and will you not defend me, and prove to him that I have a friend beside me now?"

And the next instant the dog had sprung upon the jeering François as if he would tear him to pieces, and held him round the throat for a brief second or two, till the enemy began to turn a little blue in the face.

Then my Lady, seeing the dog's power over him, spoke but a single word to Master Lion, and immediately he released his hold, while the much dazed and scarified suitor took to his heels down the valley, and was not seen or heard of for many days thereafter.

Then my darling and her champion came home together, both looking very wild and excited. My sweet girl wept, and panted, and could not get her breath to tell me what had happened for nearly an hour, though, judging from Master Lion's dishevelled coat, I fancied they must have encountered a real bear or some other vicious animal.

CHAPTER XII.

MASTER LION could not get over it any more than my Lady; he prowled around me the while I bent over her in anxiety, begging her to tell me what dire thing had come to pass. The more she sobbed the more he howled, uttering savage barks now and then, as though at some evil recollection.

"You stupid dog," I cried impatiently, for which the good beast bore me no ill-will, "why do you stand there showing your big teeth and yelping at me? Why don't you speak and tell me what it is that has put you both in such a plight?" and I took his enormous head in my hands, and looked at him steadily, for we had come to expect anything and everything of Master Lion,

even to wonders which I verily believed he could have performed if he had been asked.

Speak he could not, dear old blessed Master Lion! and more was the pity; but there was more meaning in his eyes, as he looked up at me, than there is in ordinary people's speech, and I might have guessed everything from him if my darling had not right here, in the midst of her weeping, laughed outright at my own stupidity in asking poor Master Lion to speak. Then she told me what had passed, and the worthy dog confirmed all she said with a variety of actions and noises wholly incapable of being described.

You may well imagine my state of mind when she had finished. I was in a mood to exterminate Monsieur François and all his tribe from the face of Provence. The very effrontery of the thing took my breath away. How had he dared speak so, or indeed speak at all, to a daughter of Saint-Rambert, he the low-born fellow! How had he rewarded my young master's friendship but to insinuate ill of him, laying purposes to my darling that could come only

from his own base imaginings! Oh the very ingratitude of it! But ingratitude itself is a low-born trait, and lives but in the breasts of adders and their semblants. Do what you will for them, they will turn round and sting you at their own time; for they are creatures of the soil and born to crawl upon the earth.

"Monsieur le Marquis shall hear of this," I cried in indignation. "I will go to Madame at once. That contemptible being must not tread upon Saint-Rambert ground again!"

"Stay, dear Mistress Anne," broke in my Lady, who was now more self-contained than I, "say nothing of this to any one; I cannot bear it."

"Nay, nay, my sweet, but Madame must know of it. And what think you Monsieur le Marquis will say to us for allowing him still to have aught in friendship with one who seeks to offend you!"

"Not to any one, dear Anne, please," my Lady insisted, — "not to any one, not even to my cousin Philippe. He will be with us again before another year. Then will

be time enough to tell him. But I pray you, let us speak no more of it now."

I did as she wished, of course,—I had never done otherwise; and we were silent on the subject all that day, though my own brain was in a state of perplexity to find invectives strong enough and suitable for the miscreant. I had no fear of his trying to see her or speak with her as long as Master Lion accompanied her; but I knew him for a sleek coward who would hide his ugly red pate till his chance came for doing some evil trick. Therefore I watched my darling with furtive eyes, without seeming to do so, lest she should suspect I gave the matter undue importance, sometimes following her in her little walks and rides, or sending Julian with her whenever she took the hilly road to the château.

Several times, however, she spoke of it, showing me the thing was on her mind and troubled her still.

"You do not believe that Philippe could ever think I loved him for aught but himself, do you, Mistress Anne?"

"Do I believe that the sun ever thinks of

darkness, or that the angels dream of guile! No more can Monsieur Philippe think any ill of you, my love," I answered warmly, and then tried to turn her from the thought by saying: "Now read me my dear young master's last bulletin to you. I should like to hear again about that paragon friend of his, Monsieur Lucien, whom he writes of constantly. In faith, I think it is time we were all waxing jealous of him with hearing Monsieur Philippe sing his praises. Yet if he answers to his description, I am inclined to like him already."

"Philippe is himself so true and stanch a friend that I hope he may never have another comrade less so than he," said my Lady.

"Aye, aye, to that wish, say I; but I marvel how he and Monsieur Lucien will share each other's notions of politics. For my young Marquis is, Heaven be praised! a true royalist, and will never desert his own fair colors to follow the conquering armies of the new Emperor."

But my Lady made answer: "Now, Mistress Anne, how often have you told me, in

speaking to me of my dear mother, that notions of politics and rank are in the head, while love and friendship are in the heart! Philippe will be faithful both to his cause and to his friend, believe me."

"Now, verily, you do credit to my teachings, Lady mine," I said, surprised at her having remembered the words; and thus we drifted on in our talk upon other subjects, about which my darling discoursed as eloquently.

So time passed on, and nothing of great importance happened until the end of that autumn, when certain news came to me from Wolverton, which scattered what small wits I had, even as fallen leaves are set a-spinning by a sudden November gale. It was now near twelve years since I had left our English home, and my brother David was even then a man full grown, with stiff ideas about love-making and matrimony, ever making jest of me for that my head was full of lovelorn rubbish, and telling me a man, and a woman too for that matter, was aye better without it. I had that faith in his firmness in such matters that I often

said, "David will live a bachelor all his days, and I know not whether to be sorry or glad, though I do know there is not a woman in all our country good enough for him." I had as soon thought of doubting the words of prophets, or the faith of martyrs, as dream that David should ever waver in this belief or weaken in his principles.

Now, what was not my utter bewilderment to learn from his own writing of it — I should never have believed else — that he was now betrothed to a young lass of our town whom I did not know, but who, he said, was as bright and sweet as a new primrose, and whose many virtues he lauded with the ardor and glibness of a Romeo. It shook my faith in human kind more than in David, and I think that when I recovered from my vast surprise, I loved him all the more for it, recognizing in him that one touch of nature which links us all in common brotherhood. I knew his great stout heart needed that sweet food which makes strong men tender. He was not o'er young to marry, — having left his one-and-thirty years a good bit behind; but to me, and

all who love him, David was ever young and good to look at. His smooth, round boyish face, the mirror of his sunny nature, has never lost its brightness or its kindliness; and I felt sure that the maiden who had won his heart to her had won a mint of priceless gold.

They were to be wed that Martlemas, after the autumn crops had been harvested and stowed away, so that David might in all freedom of conscience betake himself and his young bride to London-town for a honeymoon journey. Bless my heart, what a progressive generation it is, to be sure!

When I told my Lady of the fact, she would not rest till we had packed a chest full of gifts for the happy pair, all manner of beautiful and useless things for the likes of a yeoman's wife. Nevertheless, they all went, together with our good wishes and blessings to them both; for my darling, though remembering David but dimly, had kept a lively interest in him through my mentioning him so often. I was happy for the dear brother. Be it far from me to have been otherwise! But the vivid picture of his

happiness flashing so suddenly before me took me back, in spite of myself, with some regret to our little town of Wolverton, so far away beyond the waters, where so much of my own young happiness lay buried.

CHAPTER XIII.

ONCE more the sweet May-time was with us, and Provence everywhere lay smiling and radiant; for though here the sun's rays never quite lose their genial warmth, the year around, yet here, too, the springtime is ever welcome, ever fresh and beauteous; not like the white spirit of the North, rising from its grave of killing winters, but rather as one that wakes from dreams of love and paradise. The little streams came tumbling down the mountain side with a new frolicsome rippling, murmuring their way in and out of our lemon-groves awhile, and then darting suddenly down to join the swift and noisy Rhone. Everywhere the pale hyacinths lifted their heads among the green, the violets peered out from between the

young trefoil, and the fields and hill-slopes were purple with anemones. The delicate foliage of the olive and pepper trees sifted the rays of the noonday sun, flecking the velvet sward beneath with patches of bright gold; while the first breath of approaching summer came in at the open windows with that lulling, soothing sense of peace which has no earthly name.

My Lady spent much of her time in her little garden, — the place that she loved best, for it was rich in fresh, wholesome, simple flowers, full of life and vigor like herself, that grew of their own fancy as freely as they might have done on the lap of yonder mountains. No gardener's spade ever touched their tender roots, nor did their stems know the sharp edge of his scythe; and none but my Lady ever plucked them from their hiding-place. Vines and mosses climbed at their pleasure over the old stone-wall that enclosed it, and two leafy mulberry-trees stretched out their branches between it and the blue heavens. It was a quaint little garden, fair and beautiful as though the hand of God had made it; and my darling loved

"In her little garden."

it better than all the magnificent parks and flowered terraces of the great château. She had played in it when a child, and now she liked nothing better than to sit here and dream all the pleasant visions that lure us when we look into the future with the eyes of hope and youth.

We were now expecting Monsieur le Marquis home on a furlough of some months; his years at college being near at an end, and it being the custom of young students to ask for leave of absence in which to rest and muster up their courage for the final labors. News had been brought that they were now at Avignon. I say they, because, of course, my young master had brought his bosom-friend home with him, — Monsieur Lucien Dancourt, I think he wrote, though I am never quite certain, even now, of these new French names; and the coach had been sent to the city after them, and we were awaiting them hourly, I might say. My darling was in a state of pretty excitement, and she and Master Lion had been back and forth from the château a dozen times that morning. For Madame must have on her

best lace mantilla, and her pretty hair dressed in a row of smooth, soft curls on each side of her face in the way that so well became her, and I must wear my new cap, all in readiness to receive the young master.

"Now, Master Lion, see that you give a good loud bark the minute they enter at the iron gate," said my Lady; and she pointed her finger at the dog, as she did in teaching him a lesson. "And now come and let me put some flowers in your collar, else you shall not be in festive garb for your master's coming;" saying which she led him into the little garden and was bending over him so busily, and they were both so absorbed in the task, that they heard not the creaking of the old garden-gate on its hinges, nor heard any footsteps behind them, till a tall shadow fell across them both, and a voice, deep and soft, said, —

"My Lady!"

Then there was a cry of joyful surprise that brought me at once to the window, and Master Lion frisked and scratched around in such mad frenzy, uttering such loud barks of welcome, that I could not catch a word

of what was said till several minutes after. I saw Monsieur Philippe set his eyes on my darling with a look that was new to his handsome young face. He turned a little pale and then flushed red, as a maiden might have done at sight of her lover. But my Lady saw it not, for she had thrown her arms about him, and her head rested on his shoulder, while she laughed and wept all at once, saying, —

"Oh, Philippe, Philippe, how was it you did not let me know you were so near! I scarce knew you when I looked up; you are grown so tall, so serious, — so like a Marquis, in truth;" and she held him off at arms' length and looked at him full in the face, without a flutter, without a drooping of her long lashes, without a blush save that of honest pleasure at seeing again her dear cousin.

Then he saw that her heart was as yet unopened, that she was still the child he had left her three years agone, though changed in many other ways.

"How could I let you know better than in coming myself?" he said, in the same tender tones. "I would have no one else

come; for I meant to surprise you well. And you are glad to see me, cousin?"

"Glad!" exclaimed my darling. her face all smiles. "How can you ask it?"

"To hear you say it, Maidie dear; it is such a sweet welcome."

"Then will I say it a thousand times, until you weary of me;" and she smiled at him roguishly. "But, Philippe," she added, "you have not said what you think of me after your long absence. Have I not grown very tall, and very much like a lady?"

"Very tall, very sweet, a lady, and very beautiful," returned the young Marquis, meaning it every word.

"How you have learned to say pretty things!" exclaimed my Lady, looking pleased; "but now, truly, I had not meant to beg for them."

"I had said it and more, too, had you given me time," said the Marquis, playfully; "but you are still as fond of chattering as a linnet, and, indeed, I had not the chance."

"'T was not quite that I meant, Philippe, in asking you the question; what I would

know is, if you think me changed," she said, slipping her arm in his and looking at him affectionately, — "changed as you feared I might towards you?"

"Thank God, no!" replied my young master, and spoke so earnestly that they both remained silent for a moment.

"Now tell me all that has happened these years that I have been away," he said, laying his hand over her small white one, as it rested on his dark velvet sleeve, as a flower-leaf rests upon a moss-bank.

There was much to tell, and she entertained him for a full half-hour, talking animatedly, and laughing much in her joy at being with him again; while he watched her intently with eyes that, in themselves, were worth a whole summer of love-making. It was then, as they sat together on the old garden-seat, with the darkening mulberries hanging over their heads, that I realized fully the change that had come over the young Marquis, and what the three years of absence had done for him. He was but a month twenty, and yet he was exceeding tall, and his face was taking on a manly

sturdiness that well became his young Lordship. All this did not escape my Lady's notice any more than it did mine; for every now and then, in the midst of their confidences, she would stop and eye him with a curious mixture of mirth and awe, addressing him as "Your Excellence" and "Your Highness," with her pretty Provençal courtliness, which amused and pleased my young Marquis wondrously.

Yet there was something more in Monsieur Philippe's face, which my Lady's eyes were not so keen as mine to discover, perhaps because mine are much older and better schooled in such matters. Be that as it may, I thought I read in my dear Philippe's look a something which told me that the one hope I had cherished for my darling was budding on apace, and I rejoiced secretly. I knew it for a certainty when she related to him, as best she could, what had taken place between herself and Monsieur François, a summer past. The young Marquis turned very serious, and for the first time since I had known him, I saw an angry flame light up his blue eyes.

"You have not seen him or spoken with him since, Maidie?" he asked, with much concern.

"Never once, Philippe," said my Lady.

"And why did you not let me know of this before?"

"I would not have Mistress Anne speak of it to any one, and I could not write it you, nor even bear the thought of ever telling you then. You had been so kind to him, and he spoke treacherously of you."

"I can easily forgive any wrong he may have done me, but never his cowardliness in hurting you when I was not by to defend you." And my young master said truly. Never did he speak of Monsieur François after that day, either for good or ill, — for Monsieur Philippe belonged to that class of noblemen who say evil of none, giving them rather the charity of their silence; but from that time the two were enemies.

"You believe, do you not, that I am your friend and protector, and wish to be so always?" said he.

"How can I do otherwise than believe it, Philippe, when you have done already

so much to prove your kindly feeling for me!" she said, and her eyes glistened a little at the tender emotion quickened by his words.

"Not half enough," he rejoined; "not as much as I hope to do when I am of age and the Marquis of Saint-Rambert indeed, and shall have the right to do all I wish for you;" and his smile as he spoke these words was like the rainbow that spans the firmament after a summer rain.

My Lady thanked him with her eyes, and then said suddenly: "But come, Philippe, you must go in and see Mistress Anne, who will be mightily jealous at my having kept you from her so long;" never dreaming, the blessed child, that I had been feasting my curious eyes on them, lo, these many minutes. "Come, Master Lion," she added, turning to the brave fellow, who shook himself from a long and blissful snoozing state, during which he had given assent to all that was said between his master and mistress by frequent gruntings and contented yawns. And they rose and walked towards the house.

Then I straightway rearranged my best cap, which had fallen a bit awry with leaning too far out of the window, and went forth in all seeming innocence to greet my young Marquis.

CHAPTER XIV.

HAT evening we all spent at the château, dining there in great state, as the young marquis's fine friend was here, and we must needs put on a few grand airs in honor of his coming. We were but simple folk at the château, our great name and splendid house notwithstanding, and had lived as simple, uneventful lives as need be until that time. But now, indeed, the old place seemed transformed with its brilliant lights and festive air, and Madame in her *grande toilette* and my darling looking as blushing and graceful as a bended rose, and the two young gentlemen resplendent in their velvet court-dress. I thought myself in the gay world whereof I had heard so much, when I gazed on it all and wondered

if we were not dreaming. It was the beginning of a gay season for me, I do assure you; for what with keeping up with all the festivities at the big house, — and I would not have missed one of them, though I never did more than to sit off and look on at the merry doings, — and my own house-matters, and other things of great moment which took a deal of my attention to ward off their happening, I led a busy life.

Now, that first night when I set eyes on Monsieur Lucien Dancourt, I was struck with a sudden feeling which I am at loss to describe. It was both admiration and wonder; and yet I could not reason upon it, for it was not my way to admire folk at a first glance, at least, — not until I had looked a way beyond and found something worth admiring within. The contrast 'twixt him and Monsieur Philippe was very marked. He was dark of hair and eyes; and though but a few years the elder, his look was grave and serious, like that of a student, a great artist, or a genius. His brows were deep and regular, lending a shadow to his eyes; his lips were firm

and even severe save when he smiled, and then his mouth arched a little, and such a radiance o'erspread his whole countenance, as when a straying sunbeam enters and makes glory in a darkened place. His eyes grew soft and full of light, and only then could one guess what power would lurk in them when once the fire of love possessed him.

I had never seen his like before. But he was just the man to turn a woman's head, I knew it, — to make her go mad with loving him, and break her heart or make her supremely happy, as his fancy chose; and withal he had a high-born look. I could scarce take my eyes from him; and when I did so, it was only to glance at my Maidie, who, I saw in an instant, was even more bewitched than I was myself. I had always thought her fair to look upon; but now, as she sat under the brilliant lights, in her soft silken gown, her cheeks aglow with this first taste of worldly excitement, her eyes sparkling with a deep violet fire, I thought her the very picture of maiden loveliness. I watched her with as much

surprise as admiration. All the evening she talked as wittingly and disported herself with as much ease and grace as though she had been brought up at the Emperor's gay court. It was the ease and grace of a well-born woman, which I knew her to possess; yet to me she was still such a child that I was scarce prepared to see her blossoming all in one night into a *grande dame* of the world.

Was it the sight of that dark, handsome face, the magic of those subtle eyes, the power of that witching smile that had touched the hidden spring in my darling's heart, which my young Marquis had sought in vain that very morning, and through which her very soul now came leaping forth as on the wings of a new life! I knew not; but I saw it all, — this unexpected change in her, — through a dim mist that filled my eyes, and felt with sudden chill disappointment all my airy castles of twelve years' building tumbling sadly about my foolish head.

Now, Monsieur le Marquis was mightily pleased at the favor shown to his friend by those at his home; for Madame took him

to her heart at once, first as Philippe's comrade, and then for his own sake, admiring him greatly because of his gentle courtliness and pretty attentions to her, which reminded her of her own days of youth and prosperity. But Monsieur Philippe was mostly pleased at Maidie's pretty welcome to him. He had spoken of his fair cousin to his friend sometimes, though cautiously; for being still of tender years, he was afraid of his secret, and held it close enshrined in his heart as some sacred thing. Monsieur Lucien and my young master, during their years at college, had grown together in closest friendship, — such a friendship as one reads of in ancient lore of heroic deeds among men. It was beautiful to see them together, so strong, so true, so bound in heart to one another, sharing each other's thoughts as brothers; and yet the young Marquis had for some nameless cause withheld this one thing from him, that Fate, no doubt, might have its jealous way. They differed on a few subjects, as good friends must needs do to remain such; for Monsieur Philippe was a Saint-Rambert, and hence

a royalist, and Monsieur Lucien was a true son of the republic, though a nobleman of the truest sort; but there was between them a brotherhood that levelled all differences of opinion and education, so that while Monsieur le Marquis said, "Vive l'ancien régime!" Monsieur Lucien flourished his sword in the air and cried, "Vive l'Empereur!" and still they were the best of friends.

When we rode home in the yellow coach that night, my Lady — all wrapped in her fleecy snood, for the night air is always a bit fresh even in the spring-time in Provence, — my Lady, I say, could talk of nothing else but of Cousin Philippe's friend. Her brain was full of him, of his look, his words, his fine bearing, — which was princely enough, in truth, though he did not spell his name with an apostrophe, as his ancestors had doubtless done a few generations back.

"You do not wonder now, Mistress Anne, that Philippe is fond of him and has spoken of him much in his letters," said my darling, after dealing me an endless chapter on the attractions she had discovered in him.

"I do not wonder at anything Monsieur le Marquis does, for all that he does is well," said I.

"And you think him well-looking?"

"Well-looking enough, as men of the world go," I answered with a shrug. "They are all more or less so; at least, they make one think so with their smooth sleek ways, and the fine airs they put upon themselves when they look at one. His countenance is not bad, in truth, but Monsieur Philippe's eyes are more to my liking;" for I would not think too well of the new-comer so soon, nor yet have her do so.

"Philippe is so different," said my Lady, musingly; "perhaps that is why they admire each other so much. We know and love Philippe so well that no one, of course, can seem quite perfect beside him, but Monsieur Dancourt is a worthy friend."

I felt somewhat reassured at this, and said: "Monsieur your cousin has such a face as the good Fra Angelico might have been glad to look upon for a model, and one may read his soul in it; but Monsieur Lucien's face is like that of your favorite

heroes in romance, dark and mysterious, and one can make nothing out of it."

My Lady laughed, — a happy, rippling laugh, as fresh a laugh as ever came from the lips of a light-hearted maiden, and patted me on the cheek, saying, —

"What a dear, jealous Mistress Anne you are! Then you are almost as fond of Philippe as you are of your Maidie?" and she peered into my face with her saucy, kitten-like way.

"Almost," I made answer.

"That is well," she said, "and I am not jealous, you see. And now you must like Monsieur Dancourt for Philippe's sake, and be very kind to him to-morrow, for they are coming to see us at the farm in the morning, to sit in my little garden, and drink a cup of our very best milk."

And that is the way the whole thing started. From that hour I had but little peace of mind or body, for it began all over again, — their going back and forth from the château, just as they used to do when they were children; every day or oftener, on some pretext or other, the three were to-

gether, and I was fain to keep my eyes wide-open to see that no mischief came of it. But do what I would, the mischief did come; and eager as my watching had been, I got no inkling of the matter till it was too late. However, I might have known how it would be. Had I not had experience enough in my long life to teach me that the heart of woman is born and bred in perversity! I might have known that this dashing youth, with his fine smile and courtly graces, coming fresh and new from abroad, with that touch and tinge of the gay world about him which is the finest and surest web for trapping young hearts, — I might have foreseen, indeed, that he would come into our quiet lives like a thunderbolt, and stir up our monotony a bit too much mayhap. Still, I held my peace; for where is the use of words in fighting against such things? Words never do anything but harm as I knew well from having heard too many of them in the days of my own waywardness. She would go mad with loving him, I saw it from the first; she was just the one to do it, so quick, so impetuous, so

wilful when she set her mind to anything, so like her dear young mother, the saints bless her memory! and he would love her in turn, how could he help himself? and that would be the end of all my dreams. And what was to become of my dear young master afterwards, I should like to know! So I fretted myself with thinking of all this, and wondered what evil I had done in this world, that every hope I had nursed, either for myself or others, through my whole life, should have turned upon me like an enemy!

But this loving is a wondrous thing, after all, say what you will, — you who laugh at my silly notions about it, and say that love is out of the fashion. Out of the fashion, indeed! Perhaps you think so now, but have a care lest some day you too are laid a victim to the gentle malady, and I turn round and smile at you, even as I smile at David for his downfall, though Heaven knows I do so without malice. I am older than you who read these pages, mayhap, yet I am not too old, and may I never be too old, to look tenderly upon a heart that trembles at the

approach of Love, as doth a waking flower-bud at the first kiss of morning. Ah, no, one is never too old to say sweet things of loving, for there is naught else in life so beautiful, or that so long endures. Love has not always been kind to me; but what matters that! I am still loving and foolish enough to bless love wherever I see it, and grieve only a little by the wayside that so ill a portion of it hath been mine.

CHAPTER XV.

THERE was a prettier road than the one we were wont to take from the Dépendance to the château, — a roundabout way, to be sure, but one which the young folk called picturesque, because it crossed two or three rustic bridges that spanned our little rivulet, and went winding in and out the woodland, and over gentle hill-slopes, with only a narrow foot or bridle path marked out among the grasses. Passing by our house, it stretched its pretty way through our farmlands and lemon-groves, and thence led onward a few leagues off to the walls of the city. And many who needed not to travel in great haste took this way in their goings

and comings, preferring its narrow loneliness and the cool shadow of its skirting trees to the hot and sandy open road, where coach and cart raised a mighty cloud of dust.

Monsieur Lucien, sometimes accompanied by the young Marquis and sometimes alone, would often take this way to town, whither he travelled every day or so, to hear a little what was going on in the busy world, and to learn what great victories had been won by the Emperor's armies, for his mind was full of it and nothing else. He was just the man to take delight in all the daring deeds of war, with that serious, handsome face of his, and he was even then awaiting some papers or orders, I know not precisely what, to join the great expedition to the Nile.

Now, for the life of me, I could not see why he should sigh for that dark land of Egypt, with nothing better offering than the smell of gunpowder, while the plains of Provence lay smiling and glorious before him, nor why Monsieur Philippe should listen to him so eagerly when he spoke of it, and envy him a little his five-and-twenty years, and his free line of thinking, that

made it just for him to engage in such alluring pursuits. Ever since I first began to notice what a power he had to bewitch my darling, I had watched her closely and with a jealous eye, seeing how every day unconsciously he drew the gilded net of his fascination closer around her, as a spider wraps its web about the heedless fly fallen in its way. I saw the color come and go in her cheeks when he spoke to her; that when he was near her she seemed to see no one else; how quiet and thoughtful she grew when she was alone, sitting for a long time beside the oriel-window, her hands fallen idle over the work in her lap, and a dreamy, far-away look in her blue eyes; and in her eyes I could almost read every thought that was in her mind. Sometimes they were soft and velvety as the hearts of purple pansies, and sometimes they were deep and liquid like big blue lakes.

"There is no mistaking it," said I to myself; "it always begins with these signs. Oh that I had a remedy for it, — some good strong herb to cool the fever of it! But try to turn backwards the swift course of the

Rhone, and you will sooner succeed than turn the course of true love from one channel into another." She did not speak of her love to me, for young things are shy to speak of it when it first comes upon them. I hardly know whether she called her feeling for Monsieur Dancourt by that name as yet. She was so young, so untaught in such matters. But there was little need of words. I guessed it all, as every one else might have done if they had chosen; as he himself might, had he not been as blind as an owl in the daytime. But his head was so full of the fighting, and his heart so eager with the desire to join it, and his face always so like a mystery to me for comprehension, that I could never read his thoughts, nor make out truly how he regarded my Lady.

One day I saw her tie on her big white hat with the wreath of daisies around it, and stand several minutes before the mirror arranging her wayward curls beneath it; then she went out without calling Master Lion. She had done so several times of late, and it began to fret me. Thinks I, there 's mischief brewing in the air, and there is naught

for me to do but to follow and see what 's the meaning of it. So I took up my spectacles that I might better see a long way off, and started out behind my Lady, keeping at a cautious distance, that she might have no inkling of my deep-laid plot. I saw her turn into the pretty, shady path, a book in hand, but not reading it, her white hat moving in and out among the trees as she tripped along lightly as a snow-bird. Thus she led me on and on, down one hill and up another, and so fast that my poor old feet had a weary time keeping up with her younger ones, and I would fain have stopped now and then to rest and get my breath, had not my old curiosity urged me onward.

At length she came to where the road forked, the one path leading to the city, and the other to the château. There she sat herself upon a broken tree-trunk that had fallen across the green turf; not that she was tired, — the walk was not a long one for her young strength, and it was not weariness that was in her face, I knew full well, for she was restless and expectant, ever and anon rising and taking a few steps to look up one

path and down the other, and shading her eyes with her hand. Then she would come back and sit down again, while the shadows played upon her hat and gown, and the summer wind tossed her pretty curls, and the gold-winged demoiselles hovered about her like so many bright thoughts.

But presently she caught the sound of horses' feet, and up jumps my Lady, and pulls her hat down over her face, and up go the roses in her cheeks, and the sweet shy look in her eyes. In a moment more a single rider had turned into the path, and my Lady was walking slowly down the green road, deeply absorbed in the book which she held open in her hands, her face bent over it, apparently oblivious to every sound and creature round about her. It looked exceedingly pretty, and I was prepared for a love-scene then and there. My heart shot in my throat, and I held my breath to catch the sound of their voices.

"My Lady!" exclaimed Monsieur Lucien, quickly alighting from his horse, and coming forward to meet her; for it was no other than he. I knew it as soon as I caught

sight of his straight shoulders through the trees, and no other man in the country sat so tall in his saddle. "What good fortune has brought you here again to-day!"

She looked up at him quickly, and the tell-tale blush on her cheeks only added nicely to her feigned surprise.

"This is a favorite walk," she said, "and a pleasant one to the château, though somewhat longer than the way across the meadows."

"The longer the better for me, if I may walk it with you," said he; for he was ever smooth of tongue, and gentle speeches fell from his lips so naturally that he might have seemed a lover to any one speaking with him.

"What good fortune has brought you here again!" repeated I to myself, and "It is a favorite walk," indeed! That I should live to find myself an eavesdropper! and I strained my ears to hear more. But my Lady made no reply, only blushed crimson at his words, and I saw that same strange light come into her eyes which I had noticed there whenever he spoke to her in that

honeyed way, or looked at her with that rare smile of his.

My poor dear Maidie! she did not know the ways of the world and of men. But I did; and while I saw her very heart-throb as plainly as I saw their two young faces before me, I saw too that Monsieur Lucien was not one whit disturbed in his mind at meeting her thus, nor at walking beside her, while his good horse followed them without so much as being held by the bridle, and was not even jealous of their converse.

"Provence is very beautiful," he said, breaking the short silence. "I never knew how truly beautiful until I came to Saint-Rambert, though I have heard it much praised by Philippe, who thinks it the fairest spot on earth."

"Philippe is very fond of his home. You cannot think what a trial it was to him and to us when he left us to go to college," said my Lady, walking slowly.

"I can scarcely wonder at it; if I did not love him so much, I might almost envy him his good fortune, he has so much more than lands and wealth, — he has those who care

much for him. I am alone in the world," he added after a moment's pause; and I thought his tone had something of regret in it. My Lady glanced up at him quickly, her gentle heart touched in sympathy. It is so easy, so sweet a thing to feel for those who are dear to us.

"But, surely, you have many friends," she said, "friends who think dearly of you; is not Philippe such a one?"

"The best friend I have," he returned warmly, and even then he did not know how truly he spoke, "and having such a friend, I should not complain of my lot. I have neither parents nor kindred, but I have my country and my Emperor, and they are all of that to me, and more." He said this earnestly; and the fire of his enthusiasm so lighted up his face as he spoke, that I could not gainsay it, he was very handsome.

It was then that I realized what a power that young Corsican Emperor had over our young generation, and wondered what there was that made them all go mad so about him. The same fever was in Monsieur Lucien, and I saw very clearly that his heart and

soul and hopes were all bound up in the one great name whose lustre and magic shall be the glory of France as long as France endures.

My Lady eyed him curiously, and was silent. Then he said, laughing a little at his own impetuous speech, —

"But, I forget, it is treason for me to speak so to you, — you, a royalist, perhaps a Bourbon in ancestry! And I must not expect much sympathy from you on this subject."

My Lady said: "My grandfather hated the republic of his day, for it was the cause of much trouble to him, and he lost much by it; and Philippe has been educated to be the Marquis of Saint-Rambert in heart as well as in name. I am too ignorant to have any wise or just thoughts on these matters, but I am not so highly born as my cousin Philippe. My father was a Welshman, and a man of the people."

Blessed souls in purgatory! what was the child talking about, and what did she mean by speaking so humbly of herself! Monsieur Lucien did not seem to comprehend

her meaning any better than I, for he looked puzzled a minute; but presently his expression changed, and he said, with a wise look about the mouth which my darling did not see, her eyes being cast down, —

"It is no matter now; you will think as Philippe thinks when you are older, and it is right that you should."

Before my Lady had time to say another word in reply, a strange, wild, mocking laugh broke out upon the stillness of the wood, and some one rushed across the path behind them, and disappeared among the thicket. But swiftly as it was done, I saw, and my Lady saw, the thick slinking figure of François, and recognized his voice in that great coarse laughter which was more like the utterings of a wild animal than of a human being. My Lady started violently, and turned as white as one just dead; and involuntarily she laid her hand upon Monsieur Lucien's arm for protection. I should have rushed out to her if he had not been so very kind, taking the little hand in his, and stroking it, as one does a frightened birdling.

"What is it terrifies you so?" he asked,

for she continued to tremble even more than before. "It was but some country bumpkin who tried to startle us with his shrieking, and thought it cunning. Had he not been so quick, and you so white and frightened, I should have caught him and given him a good trouncing for making such ugly noises." He made light of it, and wondered, no doubt, at her sudden fear; but my Lady only said, with her bright looks all gone, "Let us hasten home, if you please."

My very blood was boiling. The mocking featherhead! Had he been hiding there and listening to their talk? Had he been following my Lady thither and yon, other days? — for this was not the first time she had met Monsieur Lucien here; his words implied as much. What could be his purpose? We had not set eyes on him, lo, these many months. I never learned whether Monsieur le Marquis had held any words with him after hearing of his cowardly act; but I thought he had kept prudently out of sight; and now, to my utter amazement, here he was hanging about in secret places, seeking to do some mischief, I had not the least

shadow of doubt. I resolved that I must keep a stricter watch over my darling, that she should never leave the house alone without me following close at hand: and I had no compunctions as to my own eavesdropping it being done of good purpose. So, seeing that she was at present in safe hands, I turned into the wood, and cut my way across it, that I might reach our house in plenty of time to greet them.

CHAPTER XVI.

OW, my Lady said never a word to me of her meetings with Monsieur Lucien, and hence nothing about having encountered that villanous François in the wood. I marvelled not that she was silent. I knew the hour would soon come when she would stand in need of pouring out her heart to me, and I bided my time in patience, knowing well that confidences must not be forced from young lips. I could not guess what my young Marquis thought of it all, but I felt that matters waxed on from bad to worse for him, — he with sighing for my Lady, and she sighing for some one else. Things were in a pretty state, I do assure you, — for no one spoke his mind, fearing to

hurt his neighbor; and where is the good of that, say I? Men do these things for love of one another, and stand aside to let their life's happiness go by. Heaven bless them for it! but I doubt me if they ever reap a rich enough reward. So my dear Monsieur Philippe kept a tender eye on our Maidie, sometimes guessing the truth and sometimes doubting it; for being young, and therefore hopeful, he could not but mistrust his fears at times, remembering that she had loved him these many years, — as indeed she had, fondly as a brother.

Not long after the day of my discovery in the wood, we were spending an afternoon at the château, and the three young people were sitting in the big open rotunda, the one looking to the west, so that the redness of the setting sun came streaming in upon their heads, making a pretty picture of the group. My Lady was busy at some dainty stitchery at which her fingers were very deft, fashioning a bit of landscape with the bluest sky and the greenest trees and the brownest sheep that ever grazed on tapestry. Monsieur le Marquis was leaning over her

shoulder, admiring, and exclaiming over her handiwork; while Monsieur Lucien did likewise at a more respectful distance. He was toying with a little trinket that hung from his shoulder on a blue silk cordon, — a small round golden medal with one bright jewel in the centre, so bright, indeed, that every time it caught the light, it glistened and sparkled so, that my Lady was fain to wink in looking at it. It was not a thing of great beauty, to my thinking, having no good saint's head upon it, only some curious letters in a tongue I could not read; and yet he made much of it, and never was without it on his person.

Monsieur Philippe had teased him many times about the quaint thing, to find out how he came by it, and wherefore he treasured it. But Monsieur did never tell him anything to his satisfaction, only smiling and saying it had never belonged to his mother or his grandmother, or any kith or kin of his. Whereupon the young Marquis looked his friend straight in the eye, and said with playful earnestness, —

"Now, I am certain, Lucien, some fair

lady gave it you, — some lady whose name you have kept from me. For shame! to put such ill-trust in me!"

"Nay, nay, Philippe, I swear no lady ever gave it me; have I not told you so a hundred times?"

Thrice my Lady's color came and went, yet Monsieur Philippe did not see it as he stood behind her chair, for her head was bent low over her work, ere Monsieur Lucien laughingly said, —

"Now, to prove to you that I speak in good faith, and not in jest, I will part with the trinket and give it to my Lady, if she will take it from me;" and he took the blue silk cordlet and slipped it round Maidie's neck with perfect unconcern, and, to my thinking, a shameful want of emotion. "Will you not believe me now?" he asked, turning to Philippe. "Surely I should not part with it if it had left a lady's hand! But if you are still curious, ask my Lady what 's its history; she knows as much of it as I."

My young Marquis smiled. "The mystery is deeper than ever," he said; "but let it be so, I 'll question you no more about it,

I 'll take your word, for you are a true knight, Lucien ; " and he laid his arm tenderly about his friend's shoulders, for their love was very true and strong.

My darling appeared mightily pleased with the little gift, and made as much of it as though it had been given her by a king, turning it over and over to admire it, and letting it rest on the broad collar of her gown, now on one side, now on the other, and looking down at it with pretty coquetry. I fancied I noticed a certain emotion pass over her when he had laid the silken cord about her shoulders, but it must have been only one of my idle imaginings, for when she looked up again to thank him, it was gone. But I knew her heart was beating very fast because his gift was resting so close beside it.

It so happened that, later in the evening when they two were sitting alone together, my darling took Monsieur Philippe to task for questioning Monsieur Dancourt so closely on the subject of the medal before her. But my young master had his own reasons for having brought up the matter, though

my Lady guessed none of the feelings that disturbed his young breast. How should she, forsooth! and he did not enlighten her, but sought instead to read her own thoughts secretly and see what lay there, that he might not, should he have guessed aright, trouble her first sweet happiness by any regret of his own. So he said, in his ever sweet-tempered way, —

"Indeed, cousin, I could not forbear jesting with him a bit, knowing he is not to be hurt sorely on this point; for I verily believe that in all his life he has never thought fondly of any woman. We have been friends these three years, and I should have had his confidence, had it been otherwise; though, perhaps, I am not fully deserving of it."

"Why should you not deserve his confidence, pray?" said my darling, who could not bear to have Philippe underrate his merits. "Have you ever kept aught from him; has he not had all of your trust?"

"Not all," said my young master, very softly. "I fear I have had a secret from him through the whole of our friendship;

not that I would not trust him, but that I can scarce trust myself to speak of it."

"A secret, Philippe! what can you mean? What is it that you have kept from him, from me, so long a time?" cried my Lady, coming near to him, and guessing for the first time by his face that he was in trouble, and that his generous heart had withheld it in concealment. "Can you not speak of it to me? Can I do nothing to help you?"

"I fear not," said the young Marquis, and he looked at her in silence for a moment. But I from my corner, where I sat knitting and dreaming, saw that his lip trembled.

"Oh, but perhaps I may, Philippe, only let me know what it is. How should we have any secrets from each other? Are we not brother and sister, and the truest and dearest of friends?"

"The dearest and best of friends, ever!" he said.

"Then I must know what it is that troubles you, else I shall think you do not love me any more;" and my Lady clung to him, innocent of the pain her every kind word caused him.

He drew her arm through his, and speaking earnestly, he said: "Listen, cousin dear, and I will tell you since you wish it, for you can surely say whether there is any hope for me. Ever since I went away from Provence, three years ago, I have loved some one very dearly, with the love that comes to man for woman. I have carried her in my thoughts every hour of the day, and in my hours of unconsciousness her image has not left me. I would have given my all to win her love, but I never shall, and perhaps it is better so. I know that she is far too good and too beautiful to belong to me."

"Hush, hush, Philippe, my brother, my brave, dear boy!" said my Lady, laying her fingers gently on his lips, her heart going out to him in deepest sympathy; "speak not unkindly of yourself. I am sure that she must love you; how can she do otherwise, if she knows you, — knows how good, how noble you are? Oh, let me go to her and tell her all you have been to us, and make her love you! It is not right that you should be unhappy, and you are brave

and beautiful enough for any woman on earth."

Ah, me! that my darling, in all her innocent unconsciousness, should be the one to wound him! She laid her head on his arm, in her affectionate, sisterly way, and held him close, while her well-meant and kindly words of sympathy entered into his heart like a shaft, for with them he saw his last hope vanish, and he knew from that moment that she had not understood. It was better so. He felt that she spoke to him from the depths of her loving, pitying soul, because her own heart was full of that same doubting, fearful love — for another. He looked away from her, and his face and lips were very white, so that my heart sickened at sight of him, and the tears rolled from my eyes till I could see nothing more for a while. But I knew that a mighty struggle went on within him during those few brief seconds, for when he turned round and spoke to her again, his face was very calm and his voice quite steady.

"We will not speak of it again, Maidie

"Play fair, cousin mine, have you no secret to tell me?"

dear, but I will surely tell you when all is well with me once more," he said. "And now, Maidie," he spoke very gently, "play fair, cousin mine, have you no secret to tell me? I have told you the only one I have ever kept from you in my life."

My darling began to tremble, and hiding her face against him, she fell to weeping. He soothed her very tenderly, setting aside his own grief, and thinking only of her happiness. A man is surely the best of comforters, after all, if he is kindly-hearted as is my dear young master, and the strongest, most helpful of friends in moments like these; and happy are they that have such a friend in the day of their need!

"I thought I had guessed something of it," he said, "and yet I was not sure, thinking perhaps I imagined much, because my own mind dwelt much on such things."

"You have guessed aright," said my Lady.

"It is Lucien, is it not, Maidie?"

"It is Lucien," she said very low, as a child at confession; and they remained a

long time silent, in the sweet communion of souls that feel for one another.

I do not know how silent or how dismal an evening we should have spent thus, if Master Lion had not happened on the scene presently, announcing himself with no more ceremony than his usual deep sonorous bark, which sounded unusually deep and startling in the stillness of the dim twilight. I gave a jump, and asked him what he meant by waking folk from a sound nap with such unseemly sounds. But the only response he made was to stretch himself his whole length on the floor, resting his nose between his two front paws, and eying me from the corner of his big brown eyes with the most insolent unconcern. When the candles were lighted, I told my two good children what a strange dream I had had, as I sat dozing in my chair, and my darling was fain to pick up many stitches that had fallen in my knitting, which was a certain proof that I had "lost myself" awhile.

CHAPTER XVII.

NOW, I had guessed very nearly the substance of all I heard said betwixt my young master and my darling, as they sat there together in the deepening twilight, opening their hearts to each other; and I knew it for a certainty when I crept to my Lady's bedside, that night, to see that all was well with her, and smooth down her coverlet, and saw how, as she lay there sleeping, fair and white as a lily, her bright hair streaming across the pillow like a golden cloud, she held the little medal pressed close against her breast. Ah me! hers was a desperate love, I feared me, — the kind that eats out people's hearts and brings much sorrow with it. It was so new, so strange to her,

and so sweet for that very reason. I could not but tremble and weep a bit, at what, Heaven only knows! save that I knew love and life to be full of trouble, and I loved her so well that I would stand between her and all unhappiness.

I thought of my dear Philippe's love for her, — how true, how deep, how noble it was, how free from every thought of self. He would give her up to his friend and find some comfort in so doing, because he loved them both; and they would never quite understand the greatness of his sacrifice, nor the full depth and breadth of his generous soul! And so the world goes, thought I, and the good deeds lie scattered here and there in hidden places, and only a few eyes ever find them out. But mine did see all that he thought to hide from every living being, and the angels above saw, and blessed him for it!

Well, the summer days followed one another in quick succession. It was the busiest and liveliest summer I had ever spent in Provence. For all this romancing and criss-cross love-making was enough

to turn a body's head, especially when that body's head is like unto a weather-cock when the winds of Cupid blow. I noticed that Monsieur Lucien was the only cool-headed one amongst us, the only one who did not seem to be disturbed by the state of disquiet that reigned in our midst. His journeyings to the city grew more frequent, and he often returned thence in high spirits, and waxed very eloquent and excited, but ever on the same theme, — his going off to Egypt. He did actually seem to look forward to it with pleasure; and I marvelled at his bad taste in the choice of countries. For though I knew little of that far-away place save what I had read of it in the Old Testament, I felt in my bones that it was a God-forsaken land, and that men went thither for no good purpose. Be that as it may, he would think and would talk of nothing else, and regularly as the sun, his hopes rose of getting his papers summoning him to be off.

Another thing I noticed was that my Lady went very often now to visit old Toinette, and that she stayed there longer

than it takes time to guess what was her real purpose in so doing. Once I followed her there, for I bethought me of being a little jealous of her making too great a confidante of the old woman, though I knew she went not so much to talk herself as to hear the witch's favorable prognostics. I surprised them nicely. When I entered the hut, there, if you please, sat my Lady, close beside the old dame, drinking in every word she uttered as though it had been gospel truth; while Mère Toinette held both the small white hands in her withered ones, trying to fathom some great mystery that lay upon their soft dimpled palms.

"Highty tighty, indeed!" I cried. "And what are you saying, Mère Toinette, to make my Lady look so like a poppy?" for she had blushed rosy-red at sight of me.

"Hey, Mistress Anne, my Lady and I were just conferring upon some little private matters," mumbled the old witch, with a genuine witchlike look at me from her beady eyes.

"Now, you know as well as I do, that it 's all arrant nonsense," said I, with bold

Consulting Mère Toinette on very Private Matters.

incredulity, "and you should not be putting sentimental rubbish into young folk's heads."

"I don't put it into their heads, bless you! It 's themselves that come and get all my art out of me; but they 're welcome to it, they are, when they 're as sweet and pretty as my Lady."

"And what does your art say of my Lady's fortunes?" I asked, relenting a bit, and curious to hear what her prophecies might be.

But here she shook her head mysteriously, as if she were not quite clear herself on this point. She had always said, and she still maintained, that my Lady would be happy in wedlock; yet suddenly she had discovered that her line of love was not quite smooth, and she feared her time of courtship would be a stormy one.

"Stuff and foolery, every word of it!" I cried. "It 's a part of your wisdom to mix matters up as much as you are able, so as to make them seem a bit more spicy; but I 've no faith in you, Mère Toinette, and no more has my Lady."

The old woman laughed, and left off talking witchcraft, but gave us instead some fine red apples, a basketful of which had just been brought her, as a token of gratitude, by a happy pair who had consulted her in their time of loving, and had come out well satisfied.

Now, for all I had not one whit of belief in Mère Toinette's twaddle, yet her silly words about my darling troubled me more than I liked to confess even to myself. And I had naught of superstition in my nature, either; it being only the young and the great that have it. I never knew what else she had told the child before my coming; but something she must have said that disturbed her, and led her to do the strange things she did soon after.

As we walked home together, my darling spoke very little, but she nestled close to me and clung to my arm, like a child who has something to confide, and yet not daring. I did not urge her, knowing too well that the best way to make folk tell a secret is by seeming to care not one fig about the matter. Still the time was not

yet come for her to tell me everything, and so we walked on in silence till we had reached our own gate. My Lady would not come in, but remained a long time out of doors, busy fastening up a creeping vine under my favorite window (the one looking into her little garden), which the last rainfall had made sad havoc with.

I had quite forgotten what she was at, till I heard her voice responding a good-day to some traveller on the road; and immediately after, Monsieur Lucien was leaning over the gate, saying in unusually excited tones for him, —

"I have some great news, and I was hastening to tell Philippe of them. Were you not going too to the château?" he asked, for she had on her hat still, and her bright parasol lay across the steps.

"I was but this moment going to the château," she returned.

"Then we may walk together, may we not?" he said, and opened the gate for her to pass.

"If the news bear waiting till we have walked the woodland road," replied my

Lady "I have a fancy for taking that way to-day."

"Any way will be but too short," said he, stooping to pick up her kerchief, which fell from her nervous fingers.

I watched them as they walked off together, — he so tall and of such princely bearing, she so fair and delicate in contrast, — and I could not but think how very well they looked one beside the other. Then my old desire seized me, to see and hear all that was going on. I had fallen into such bad habits of late! But what would you have me do, pray? What should you have done in my stead? I felt this to be an opportunity. I knew that something would happen during that walk; it came over me like a presentiment. And how could I wait to know the result of it till my darling came back, if I did not follow after them and learn for myself! So I waited till they had passed the cypress-trees, which being high and close together formed a dense hedge, propitious to my errand; and I caught up with them just in time to hear my Lady say, —

"Why should you not tell me the news first?" and her lip trembled, and a wild expectancy was in her eyes, as in one who fears a blow and cannot turn away from it.

"I know no reason, in truth, why I should not," he said, as if he thought it not of the least consequence to her. "I have just received my commands to join the imperial army," he said quite joyfully, "and to-night I must be at Avignon, whence my regiment leaves for Marseilles. The fleet is in readiness, and we have only to embark. If wind and fortune are fair with us, we shall meet the English at Alexandria in less than a month, and my Emperor will be the master of the Nile!"

Now, he talked on after this fashion for a good bit, just like a history book; and be it far from me to call to mind all he said, for I heard not a word more as soon as I caught sight of my darling's face. She grew as colorless as if her very life were gone from her. Her little hand clinched on the parasol, and I could almost feel that it was cold. Ah me! he did not see it, — no, for he was looking off into the

blazing glory of his future, and with no more thought of love in his pate than I had of warfare in mine.

But presently, when she could hear no more, she uttered a low cry, and her hand went to her heart, and she was nigh to swooning; when, turning suddenly, he caught her, and his face was like a book of revelations for astonishment and confusion.

"What is it?" he cried in alarm; "are you not well?" and he touched her forehead ever so lightly with his hand. In a moment the blood came rushing back to her cheeks and temples; her eyes darkened, and I thought she had gone mad, for she threw herself on the ground at his feet, crying aloud, —

"You are going away from me! Oh, take me with you; let me follow you anywhere, everywhere!" and she wrung her hands in very agony of soul.

Then, like a burst of lightning, the truth flashed upon him, and he in turn stood white and stupefied, and I could see that his heart was deeply grieved. Such a man as he I had never seen in all my long life, — so much

a man in strength of mind and purpose; so true and loyal a friend, — a friend whom one might have and keep a lifetime, with sympathy enough and gentleness of nature to be moved to tears by others' griefs, and yet invulnerable of heart! He was a mystery, a very paradox of nature. I could not, for the life of me, see why he should not have learned to love her dearly; there was no one so fair as she, methought, no woman who would be more true and tender. Perhaps, said I to myself, there is some one else; but no, he did not look the man to fall in love with more than one woman, and if my old eyes served me right, he had not seen her to know her yet. Those lustrous eyes of his, though they were bright, had never been so with aught but pride and mayhap daring, — I could not think so well of him just at that moment, — and I knew that stern mouth had never breathed of love to any woman, else there had been softer lines about it.

Now, when he saw what he had done, — all unwittingly, to be sure, but the harm was done nevertheless, — he raised her to him, and sought to comfort her and to be kind,

though not so kind as I should have been, had I been a man in his place.

"Sit down beside me," he said, — and his voice was very soft and gentle, but not lover-like, — "sit, dear Maidie, and I will tell you what is in my heart for you, and why I cannot take you with me when I go;" and he took her little hand, her little trembling hand, in his, and spoke quite tenderly but without passion, as though he had been talking to an unruly child.

"You do not care for me!" she said, with a heart-breaking sob, and covered her face with her hand.

"Indeed, I care for you a great deal, a very great deal; but perhaps not in the way you would have me do. The love I bear you is the love I should have given to a dear sister, had I had one. I have never known or thought of any other love. But let me be your friend, your most true friend, forever."

His words seemed to have no meaning now for her. She sat like one dazed, her eyes quite dry, her cheeks and lips burning with the fire that had been in her. He

spoke for a long time, and I could see that he was telling her wise and reasonable things, which showed how ill-acquainted he really was with young love and its mad impulses. But she heard him not; yet she grew calm and silent after a few moments had passed.

And I, behind my green hedge-screen, saw it all, and did not dare cry out. Ah, my poor, poor Maidie! how I did long to fold her in my arms and comfort her, though I knew too well that her grief just then was comfortless, — that tender, yearning creature, who had never known a sorrow, and who needed naught but love to make her happy! It was a sorry blow, and I knew her young spirit would be crushed by it, and would feel the sting of it long after.

"And now," he said at length, "you will let me take you back to the farm; and you will try to forget this day, and to forgive me for aught of pain I may have caused you, dear Maidie?"

"I will try to forget this day," she said, quite humbly. "Pray let me go alone;" and she looked at him once, and walked slowly away. He stood and watched her

long and thoughtfully, till her slender white figure was but a dot in the shady green path beyond, with I know not what expression of despairing wretchedness on his own countenance.

"He stood and watched her long and thoughtfully."

CHAPTER XVIII.

SHE did not return home immediately. The very thought of seeing her every-day surroundings or of meeting any one oppressed her, I knew. Ere she had regained the end of the cypress hedge, Master Lion ran out to meet her, at first joyfully, as was his wont, but, very soon divining his young mistress's great trouble, he showed himself full of sympathy. Now, just at this moment, there was no one who could have given my darling better comfort than this dumb, loving creature, who understood her every thought without any need of words, and whose mute caresses were more soothing to her than human hands, because with him her secret was her secret still, and he sought not to read it.

As soon as he came up to her, and laid his tall head against her hand, and looked at her in that tender beseeching way which only dogs have, she put both her arms about his shaggy neck, and laid her head against his, and the silent tears fell without restraint. If ever I did hear a dog cry, sure it was our good old Master Lion at that moment. They entered together a little way into the deep of the wood, and my Lady sat on the same broken log where she had sat a few short weeks agone, when her love was new and sweet upon her, to await his coming. Ah, how dull was the wing of the gauzy demoiselles now; how sickening the scent of the wood-flowers, how suffocating the breath of that summer day, now when her dream was fled!

"You do not know, my good dog, you cannot know!" she repeated, rocking herself to and fro, still holding the creature's neck close to her breast. But he knew very well that she was heart-sore, and that was enough for him; he suffered with her as really as though the shaft had been in his own heart. He laid his good head in her lap,

and licked her hand, and put his cold muzzle to her white face, showing his great tenderness in a hundred unspeakable ways.

They remained there together a long time; and my Lady grew calmer, for when she returned to me, there was no trace of tears upon her face. As soon as I heard the clicking of the gate, for I had preceded her by a good half-hour, I went to the door to meet her. I could not bear that she should come in and find herself alone, though knowing that young people take a cruel pleasure in brooding over a new-born sorrow. I took her in my arms, and held her there a minute, without saying any words, and she rested contented.

"My heart's love!" I cried, when I could stand it no more, "that I should see you suffer!"

She kissed the edge of my cap, her eyes being bedimmed with a new rush of tears, and said, "Dearest, I will tell you all sometime, sometime, but not now;" and she went up to her little room, and shut out all the light of day, and remained there alone until sundown.

I spent some weary hours, as you may well suppose, the rest of that wretched afternoon, and I could make a book of the thoughts that passed through my troubled brain during that time; but what matter the thoughts we have when they only brew and brew in our heads, and accomplish nothing? Late in the afternoon, my young master himself came over to say that his friend would leave the château that evening at eight o'clock, and brought his regretful farewells to us. I never knew what passed between the two, after Monsieur Dancourt left my darling and returned to the château, or how much he told of what had happened. I fancied they spoke little of it, for Monsieur Lucien was a man of few words; but I learned afterwards from Madame, that they had parted in friendship, but sorrowfully, so that Monsieur le Marquis could not bear to ride with him to the gates of Avignon.

Now, as evening drew on apace, for our autumn twilights are of but a minute's lasting, I heard my darling walking to and fro overhead, every now and then going

to the window to push the shutter open and look out upon the night. I hearkened to every sound she made, for I was anxious of what she might do in her present mood, knowing so well her excitable nature. She must have heard Monsieur Philippe's words to me, as he stood only a moment at the gateway, and her window was just above; I could see no other way for her guessing the exact time of Monsieur Lucien's departure. Albeit a few minutes before the clock struck eight, she came down the stairs very quietly, wrapped up head and all in a dark mantle, and slipped out into the garden. Then she called Master Lion in a low voice, and whispered a few words in his ear, and they started off together in the direction of the little wooded bridle-path leading from the château to Avignon. In another minute I was after them. She is going to stop him, I thought, or perhaps only to look upon him once again, ere he leaves her forever; so frenzied is the heart of woman in its passion, that it loves to dwell upon the face and form that is dear, even though the sight of that face burns its way into her heart.

The wood was very still. The moon was just rising above the tree-tops, and every shadow was the deeper for its brightness. I followed them for a full quarter-hour, with no other sound breaking the deep silence but the crushing of the first few fallen leaves beneath my feet, the snapping of a dry twig here and there, and the loud beating of my own heart, which seemed to me so boisterous that I thought the thumping of it would surely wake the sleeping birds. It was a fearful thing, this secret night-watch, for one who had never been o'er-brave when it came to being in dark places; yet there was my darling going on and on before me, stark mad, I thought, but yet daring to venture out alone in this grewsome place, with no fear of heart, only to look once upon the face of the man she loved.

At the place where the road turned and led onward to the city, the path broadened somewhat, and the trees parted, so that the white moonlight fell full upon the grass, and every blade and leaf and branch glistened like silver under it; but all be-

yond was black. My Lady and the dog stopped just before they reached this spot, well shaded by the surrounding thicket and yet at arm's length from the open way. There they crouched themselves in a quiet heap and I behind them, all in breathless and fearful expectation. Whatever happens, I thought, we are three, and Master Lion is very strong and full of sense. So we waited there what seemed to me an endless time, though it was really but a few minutes. Once or twice a soft wind swayed the branches of the trees overhead, and the leaves rustled gently as if whispering some secret to one another, and the birds twittered in their nests at the disturbance, while from time to time a distant owl poured out its dismal note on the night stillness.

Presently another sound was heard unlike any of the sounds of nature going to rest. A man's stealthy foot-fall, not a horse's tramp, and the muffled clanking of steel. A short thick figure crossed the moonlit patch in the road, and disappeared in the opposite thicket, and then all was quiet again. But in that brief second my Lady,

Master Lion, and I saw the face of that villain François, though his hat was pulled down far over his eyes, and there was a weapon unsheathed in his hand. The dog almost gave a leap after him; but my darling held him back, and whispered very low in his ear, "Good dog, is it he?" and the dog seemed to answer that it was. "Lie very still, Master Lion," she murmured, and another interminable second went by.

As soon as I realized who it was that lay hidden across the way beyond us, I felt that some unexpected evil was at hand. What was his purpose there, in the dark of night, with weapons about him? Who was it he lay in wait for upon the château road, but those who, he knew, would travel thence? — he the ingrate, who had for years received the bounty of those whose wrongs he meditated! Was it his jealousy? He had been on the watch, prowling about, I knew it, ever since I had spied him, that first day, here in this wood. How much did he know of what had passed between Monsieur and my Lady? Or was it his envy of Monsieur Lucien's friendship with my young master,

whose friendship he had so outraged? Who was it he meant to kill? I thanked Heaven that Master Lion was nigh to protect us; if he had not been, I think I had died of fright, though anger doth often brace up folk, they say, and, despite my terror, I was full of wrath.

Now, ere I had well thought out all this, the faintest sound of a horse's hoofs fell upon our ears, and soon a rider was descending the narrow path. My Lady moved nearer the edge of her hiding-place, and I could almost hear her panting, for I fancied what her thoughts might be, believing herself alone with that villain scarce a yard off. The horseman drew nearer and nearer, coming almost noiselessly, for the grass was thick and formed a soft, moist carpet. Before I knew it or had time to cry out, he was at the turning, and François had leaped from the wood and caught the horse by the bridle, at the same time raising his sword. Monsieur Lucien cried, "Halt!" and drew his own dagger from his belt. There was a flashing of steel in the moonlight! Quick as lightning itself, wild as a

panther, my darling sprang from her hiding-place, flinging herself between them only in time to receive the sharp edge of her beloved's steel on her own white cheek!

At the same instant Master Lion had bounded furiously upon François, and the two lay rolling and struggling upon the green turf, till the dog, being the stronger, dragged him along to where the hill-slope was very steep, and in the tussling got him well over the edge, so that he tumbled headlong, bruised and torn, into the stream below. It was his second encounter with Master Lion; but this time there was no one to call him off. The brave dog, whose hatred was as strong as his love, had his full revenge of him, and let him go only when he knew him to have had his just deserts.

As for me, I saw nothing of all this; I heard only the piteous cry that came from my darling as she fell swooning to the earth. Ere I reached her side, Monsieur Lucien had her in his arms, where she lay like one dead, with the red blood streaming about her hair and throat. I think the

sight of her that night was the thing that first melted his heart; and indeed a man were made of stone who had looked upon her then, so white, so beautiful, — for a woman is ever beautiful to the man for whom she gives her life, — and not loved her! I knelt beside her, and could do naught but weep and wring my hands. But he held his kerchief to her face, and smoothed her forehead gently, and his own face all the while was as white and mute as a marble image. Then he lifted her upon his horse, and, mounting himself after, held her fast in his arms, while I followed, and we travelled back to the farm-house as silently as we had come.

When my darling was laid upon her bed, and Monsieur Lucien had to leave me to go his way, — for go he must, though the stars and moon fall, now that his word was bound, — she had not yet opened her eyes in consciousness. He waited as long as he dared, for I knew that his heart was torn asunder, and that he longed to say a word to her ere he went away; but she remained white and silent.

"Tell her I shall return, if my life is spared," he said, "to ask her forgiveness;" and his voice trembled and grew hoarse, so that he could say no more. And as he took my hand and turned away, there stood great tears in his eyes, and my own heart was wrung at the sight of his manly grief.

CHAPTER XIX.

H, what a mystery, what a strange, sweet mystery, it is, that the heart of woman should turn to one man in the whole world, one man amongst all other of God's creatures, and love him and live for him alone, and make it sweeter to die for him than love any other! And yet that love is the one thing which is the bread and sunshine of the heart, that feeds and warms its every pulse, and brings forth in the time of life's harvest the richest products of the soul. How barren is a life without it, and who would not suffer all the delicious torments that it brings for the sake of living once its golden hours of joy! Sorrow is love's shadow, and those who love must sorrow, much or little, according to their strength; yet they that have lived

through both will say with me, how many of life's sorrows vanish at the memory of a single happy hour!

My Lady is a well-born woman, strong and tender. All that her love had led her to do, I would have you believe, was because of her youth, her quick, impetuous nature, and from no lack of maidenly reserve. She had never known such a love as the one that came upon her so swift and sudden and unawares during those brief summer days. She knew nothing of its wily strength, its unrelenting grasp, its maddening fever; and hence she did her own heart's promptings, which, I am sure, are never otherwise than upright and good. For many weeks after the scene of that luckless night, she lay in perfect unconsciousness of everything around her. Her brain was on fire, and she tossed and turned upon her hot pillow night and day. She would moan and rave about him, and beseech me to go to the cross-road to meet him in her stead, fancying herself still back to that time, and say to him how it was that she could not come herself, being very ill. And this I would feign to do for her

peace. I love not to dwell on those sorry times; even now my heart grows sick with thinking of them, and there are happier days coming, to which I would hasten in preference.

I never left her bed's side from the time we laid her there till I with my own arms lifted her from it, and carried her to the window to behold the dying glory of the warm autumn days. For of course she grew well and strong and rosy again, her illness not being so grievous as we had fancied at first, and the wound on her pretty face having healed so well under my care as to seem scarcely more than a pin-scratch. Still it was there, plain enough to my jealous eyes, who could not bear that her fairness should be marred in any way whatsoever. There it was indeed, stretching from her delicate eyebrow down to the little dimple next her chin, — a fine line, hardly more visible than a thread, save that it grew white whenever her cheeks flushed, and rosy when she paled. Once or twice she begged me to bring her the looking-glass, that she might see how changed she was; but I, fearing to grieve her,

did make some pretext or other to forget it. When she was well enough to walk herself to the mirror, no look of disappointment or regret came over her face when she saw the red symbol of her impetuous love, — for she had not the silly vanity to be disturbed by so small a matter, she said. She laughed at me, instead, for my vain fears, saying, —

"Why would you not let me see myself, you wily Mistress Anne! Did you think I should pine for the loss of a little beauty? I am still good enough for you to look at, am I not? Then that is quite enough."

Whereupon I would cover her with kisses, and tell her that she was a hundredfold more beautiful now than she had ever been, as in truth she was. For in the long days when she lay there on her white bed, slowly regaining strength, and drinking in the quiet, pleasurable draught of life renewed, she had had much time to ponder and learn wisdom, and she was suddenly grown gentle and womanly. Her love had not changed, not hers; it had only ripened into a fairer and gentler thing.

All through the time of my darling's ill-

ness, there had been a mighty to-do round in the village about her, and those who had known her kindly ministry could not now do enough to show their good feeling. So that I was at my wits' end to know what to do with the flowers and sweetmeats, and the many love-tokens that came to her from all the neighbors and country-folk. When she walked with Madame and me, to take her first airing, you might have thought she was the Empress Josephine herself, such a joyous clamoring as there was! I remember seeing a village mother who had come out to her door with the rest of the community to bid my Lady good-health, smack her youngster roundly for an unmannerly lad, because the urchin had not lifted his cap when the pretty lady went by. My dear Monsieur Philippe, who had left us for his last year of college while my darling was still quite low, did nothing but write letters to inquire how she did; and he sent her such magnificent gifts at Christmas time from that gay city of Paris, that my eyes would not go shut for looking at them. And Monsieur Dancourt — But I will leave

all that Monsieur Dancourt did until another chapter, for you will surely wish to hear a whole chapter more about him.

And as to dear old Master Lion, — a personage whom I beg you to believe we find it impossible to praise over-much, he having so well rid us of that pestilence, François, who I rejoice to say has never since shown his ugly face in Provence, — Master Lion, I repeat, did conduct himself throughout my Lady's illness in a way which might well stand an example to any dog; never uttering so much as a whimper when he knew her to be asleep, lying outside her door all through the night, and when admitted to her bedside, coming as quietly as a lamb to rest his brown muzzle on her white coverlet to receive his morning caress. In faith, I never saw 'twixt maid and dog such perfect, true devotion. That is why I have had to make much of him in these pages, he being part and pith of our household, sharing our joys and bemoaning our griefs as heartily as any human friend. My Lady cannot think too well of him, and no more can I, though he and I have had many a difference of

opinion, at various times, upon matters of our own, in spite of which I do affirm without fear of contradiction that he is the very paragon of dogs.

It was in the early autumn, and on a Sabbath eve, the day a year since Monsieur Lucien Dancourt had left us for his foreign warfare. My darling was sitting near a window listening to the sounds of Even-Song that came floating on the evening breeze from the windows of the little chapel in the distance. She had been silent much of that day; perhaps the sad anniversary was in her mind, as it was in mine. I saw that she was listening intently now, for it was a favorite vesper-chant, one that she used to love when a child. She had never known why she loved it better than all other music; but now her heart understood all that was tender and beautiful; and in that chant there is one strain so pure and mystic that it lifts one near to Heaven, — a strain that holds one for a single second in perfect ecstasy, and then dies away in a murmur that is like the sighing of angels. I saw her

tremble here; I myself was moved by the sweet sound, for there is naught that so stirs up one's inner self, when one is sad of spirit, as hearing some beloved music that speaks to one of happy times gone by. I, who have but scanty knowledge of the gentle art, and am but a simple, foolish old woman, as you have guessed ere this, even I have felt its thrill so keenly at times that I would fain cry out with pain or joy, I know not which.

I was about to go to my darling to cheer her up a bit, for I could never bear to see her bright young face with that pensive look upon it; but ere I plucked up my courage to disturb the cat that lay sleeping in my lap, and lay my spectacles and stitching down, in walks my young Marquis, who was now again with us, having finished his colleging and come off with all the honors, as I was certain he would do. He never let a day go by without happening in twice or thrice, always as welcome as are pleasant surprises, and bringing ever with him cheeriness and good-fellowship. The two were to all outward appearances on the same old friendly terms as in the days of their childhood, — the best

of friends and the dearest of cousins; one would never have imagined anything else.

My Lady brightened up the minute she saw him.

"Oh, Philippe, what a merry sight you are, always appearing when one most wants you!"

"Well, Lady mine," he said, laughing and with much feint of deference, "speak! what is it you want with me? You know that your wishes are my statutes," or some such pretty foolery.

"Nothing but your bright companionship," said my Lady. "I am afraid I am growing old and grumpy of late. I have done naught but sit beside this window and think, and think, and think of nothing."

"Then I will give you somewhat to think on," said my young master, and sat down near her. "Lucien has written asking leave to come to Saint-Rambert. The campaign is well-nigh ended for a time, and he has done such deeds of valor, and won so much glory to himself, that he must needs lay that aside, and come and be with us to forget his grandeur, else he shall grow in vanity."

My darling paled at the words and seemed much agitated. She did not look at Philippe, but out of the window, saying after a pause, "Why should he not come if he chooses?" and I could not tell from her tone whether she was distressed or pleased.

Philippe looked at her very closely, but her eyes were still fixed on the garden, and he could not guess any better than I did what her thoughts were.

"I think, this time, that Lucien comes for your sake, Maidie dear," he said very low, as if almost afraid to breathe the secret that had been intrusted to him, "and it is you who must give him leave. Will you not see him, and receive him kindly?"

She covered her face with her hands.

"I have been such a wilful, unruly child!" she said, laughing a little nervously through her tears. "What can he think of me now? how can he wish to see me?" and she laid her head on the window-ledge.

"Have no fear of that, Maidie," said my young master. "Lucien is a true nobleman; perhaps he can tell you better than I why he wishes to see you."

They sat in silence for a long time, and I watched them, my heart all in a flutter. "Coming again!" thought I; "well, it 's a pretty time indeed! How long was it since, — a twelvemonth to-day, did I not say? Now I suppose we shall have plenty more crazy doings, and I must needs begin once more my sentinel duty." Yet I waited anxiously to hear what my darling would say further.

When the young Marquis rose to go, she stretched out her hand to him, and said quite gently, —

"Tell him that he may come, Philippe."

CHAPTER XX.

HE heart of woman is a wayward thing, I might have known it, — I, with all my vast experience of which I so oft do vaunt myself! But I had a fond fancy that my Maidie was unlike other women, — the which she is in many ways, being fairer and gentler and more loving, to my thinking; still, in the matter of hearts women are mostly alike, — a puzzle at best, and full of contradictions. Now, I had thought, in spite of what I may have said to the contrary, that matters would surely go smoothly on, when Monsieur Lucien came this time. He had not made a confidante of me, nor could I well read his thoughts, he being so far away in that land

of fighting and of savage folk; but this is what I guessed from things Monsieur Philippe said now and then, and from certain events which befell subsequently.

Monsieur Lucien, after leaving my darling in such a piteous state as she was on the night of his going away, and all for love of him too, must have had a deal to think about during his long journey across the blue Mediterranean, and I believe that it was not all about the glory he meant to achieve under his Emperor's colors, either! I ween that his eyes and heart were opened now to a path of life more attractive and more enviable than that which leads only to glory and renown. I, for my part, could never understand why he had not loved her from the very first, and thus saved us a world of trouble. But, as I have already said, he was a mystery, and you might as well try to solve the riddle of the sphinx as to fathom his thoughts. All I do know is that when he was away from my darling and did fully comprehend the depth and strength of her nature, man-like he began to think of her tenderly, and marvelled at

his own stupidity in having been so slow about it; and he longed to say sweet things to her, the which he could not do that day in the wood, for his being dumb almost with surprise. He had thought — 't was only a passing thought — that she and Philippe cared for each other, and yet it could not be, else Philippe had confided the secret to him; they had never withheld anything from each other, he and my young Marquis. So her tender love was justly and rightly his, he thought. That he should love her in return was but a debt of friendship to Philippe, and a most sweet and easy task for himself. But now a whole sea was between them and a year's absence might make a change in her; and the very thought of this made him frantic, so that he could not be at peace in his own heart.

During that long year of absence he had learned to love her truly, — ah, yes, to love her truly and well, as 't was his nature to do all things he did well. And he did come back to Saint-Rambert in quest of his happiness, ere the summer roses began to droop or the distant hills had lost their

mantle of bright green. He came with his heart full of expectation, and many honeyed words were on his tongue, thinking to win that sweet confession from her once again with only a glance or a word. Now, this showed plainly that he had little knowledge of a woman's heart, — so fragile a thing, so like a sensitive flower, that opens when you turn away from it, and closes when you come too near. I remember well how it all came about, for now I think of it 't was not so very long ago; I remember how that I was in as much excitement as if it had been my own time of courting, as it was verily my dotage in such matters. For folk, they say, are in love twice in their lives, — at sixteen for themselves, and at sixty again for others.

It was in the morning that he came, when all the earth is fresh and laughing, when a lover's tread is light and his heart buoyant with hope. He came alone, and I fancy he thought to make their first meeting sweet, and free from any constraint at the recollection of what had passed between them a year since, by many soft and plead-

ing words, and his acting the part of a lover on the spot. But not so. When my Lady held out her hand to him, she did so with a quiet dignity that forbade anything further than a friendly greeting, and which struck him, as it did me, with a sudden chill, as when a gust of ice-laden mountain wind makes winter of a bright summer day. She showed no emotion, save that her cheeks grew a little paler, and the line across the left one stood out like a rosy thread. But that was whilst he kissed her hand, and he saw it not. Afterwards she was as serious and reserved as though she had been talking to her confessor. The little medal he had given her, and which always hung about her throat, was not visible now, though I knew full well where it lay hid. She was so changed, so demure all in a minute, that I hardly knew my darling; while he seemed to lose his wits and tongue all at once, — he who had been so ready with pretty phrases, — and I could not but pity his discomfiture.

What was it that had come over her? I pondered; true, she had grown older, and

much wiser in the past year, and more lovely, of which I saw he took full notice; but I knew that in her heart she loved him, and I could not see why she should of a sudden turn so chilly and forbidding towards him, like the maidens on a stage. Perhaps it was a cover for whatever else she felt and wished to hide from him. She knew that she had been unwise, she had confessed it to me, in speaking of her love, since; and I had often repeated to her what my dear old mother used to say to me years ago, "Never let a man ken how deep is the well of thy love for him, else he will surely draw from it too freely." But there was naught for her to feel ashamed in what she had done, that I could see, and he was far too generous of mind to think it. You see, as soon as he was in trouble, I began to swerve, and my sympathy, turning traitor, was all with him. He tried to cross the barrier that she had raised between them, by making mention of their last conscious parting, and humbling himself after the fashion of brave men in defeat, calling himself an idle fool

for letting slip from him a heart so brave and loving as her own.

"But you asked me to forget that day," she said, looking at him without changing color, "and I have tried to do your bidding."

"But I," he cried, with more fervor than I had ever seen in him before, "I cannot forget it! Did you not on that day stake your life for mine! I have never ceased to think of it since I left you, and I had hoped — "

She stopped the words.

"Then let me ask you to forget it now; I should wish it so;" and she looked away from him. But his eyes grew dark and liquid as he saw her white hand go up unconsciously to her wounded cheek, and though he remained silent, I knew his heart was as sorely wounded.

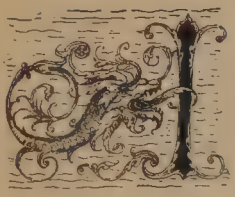
When he had left her, and was well along the road, where he walked slowly and with saddened countenance, as though the ghosts of his fond hopes walked in his wake, my darling ran to me and threw herself in my arms and cried excitedly, while I scolded her, as well as I could ever do, for her

strange behavior toward Monsieur Lucien; and then, by way of reparation, I had to humor her a bit, and have her in my own chamber for that evening's meal, which was always a recompense to her when a child. And there I coaxed and comforted her, and made her tell me her true feelings, while she laughed and cried over her tea, during the pleasing narrative. But I knew that she had learned a wise lesson, for all that, and that she would not fail to win the love that was so dear to her.

For many weeks my darling kept him in suspense, always kind, always friendly, but never giving him a look or a word of encouragement; and yet the more reserved she was, the more eager he, and the stronger grew her hold upon him. For he was not the man to be disheartened at a first failure, nor to give up hope after one defeat; he who had fought the wars in Egypt, and wore a row of golden honors across his chest, recording his valiant deeds. But she was wise now, for her years, was my Maidie, and even when she knew truly that

his heart was hers, as he had shown it by a thousand proofs, she, woman-like, would have him dwell on the uncertainty of winning her back to him, and suffer all the sweet, delicious pangs of love's lesson.

CHAPTER XXI.



WOULD fain let you guess all that came to pass at Saint-Rambert that autumn, save that there is one thing about it which you would not guess, perhaps, unless I told it you, and which concerns my dear young Marquis, Monsieur Philippe. I doubt much if I have dwelt enough, in the telling of my story, on his many noble qualities, or made you fully sensible of his great and generous nature; but I would have you bear with me patiently till the closing of this chapter, and learn what he did for my Lady, ere the next Christmas-tide, and you shall tell me then what you think of him.

Through all the time of my Maidie's and Monsieur Lucien's love-making, I never saw him once looking as if he envied his friend

a minute's happiness. He was their veritable good angel, comforting them when they were disconsolate, and rejoicing with them when their time of rejoicing came. For that time came, of course, as it must come sooner or later in people's lives. Just how or when it came about for my darling, I cannot tell exactly; for when once I saw that matters could not be made smooth with continual fretting, and sitting up o' nights to think of them, I left off my fretting and watching; and immediately matters shaped themselves as by a magic hand.

That is why I cannot tell you more of what Monsieur Lucien said to my Lady that morning, when, coming home from chapel, I found them sitting together in her little garden. At first I could not believe my eyes, and stared, and stared, and leaned up against the wall for support; for there, if you will believe me, was my haughty Lady meekly reposing in Monsieur Lucien's arms, her head resting on his shoulder, completely vanquished by the flood of tender words he was pouring forth into her willing ears; and there too sat Master Lion, as bold and

shameless as you please, looking at them with the air of one who had brought the whole matter about. They took no more notice of me than of the crickets chirping round about them; and I could not turn away, knowing they would forgive my sharing their first sweet happiness. For, at the sight of these two young creatures, pledging their faith and love to one another at last, out of the very fulness of their hearts, my old eyes grew dim, and through a mist of tears I saw my own young days, — a sweet memory that stood awhile before me like a picture. I saw a maiden not so tall or so fair as my Lady, but with a face full as happy, and I saw, too, a stalwart youth standing by her side, who wore no badge of honor save that of honesty and truth, but who to me was the noblest of God's noblemen. I saw the little house away back in good old England, — the little house with its climbing roses, that peered and smiled at us with faces no less smiling than our own. I saw the clear skies overhead, smelt the sweet scent of the hawthorn, felt all the radiance of that summer day so long, so long ago, on whose memory

so many winters have settled and yet not buried. It was all there like a dear one returned to me from the dead, and for one moment I was young again, until the sound of my darling's voice brought me back across the half-century, and I looked and saw that her lover was smiling down at her and saying, —

"Sweetheart, will you not now believe that I love you most truly, and forgive me that I learned not the precious lesson sooner?" His head was bending down close to hers, so that it rested against her bright hair.

"Forgive you!" she cried, and she was at his feet again, not like the mad child she had been on that dreadful day in the wood, but like a sweet, penitent woman, as though she had been the one to seek forgiveness.

"You must not kneel to me, my own sweet Maidie!" he cried, raising her quickly to him; and his eyes were so earnest, so full of love, as he looked at her, that my Lady paled with joy beneath the ardent gaze. Her own lids fell for a moment, as a tender flower droops under the burning eye of day, or as if she had caught a glimpse of Paradise and was dazzled by its glory. Again the

old gesture came back; unconsciously her hand went up and covered the wounded cheek. But he removed it very gently, and kissed that same cheek many times over. And then I saw how truly handsome he was, and that the face which had been so grave was both manly and tender; and I could not help loving him for that he had brought such happiness to my darling. Thus they rested silent awhile, their lips dumb for the very joy that was in them. In that supreme hour of life's happiness, the soul has thoughts for which the lips can find no words.

Then they walked out of the garden together, all in a blissful dream, towards the château, whither my dear Philippe, Heaven bless his brave heart! awaited them. And Master Lion, who had witnessed the whole scene unblushingly, followed at their side, wagging his bushy tail with unrestrained contentment.

Now, to add to their good-fortune, my young Marquis had chosen that very day to do what he had had it in his mind to do for many years, though in a different way, perhaps. It was the year of his majority; and

he was become, since the last springtime, not only the sole master of Saint-Rambert, but also the master of all his noble impulses. Therefore, when he met the happy lovers in the great entrance-hall, he came to them and kissed my Lady, and took his friend's hand, saying, —

"Let this be a happy day for me as well as you, and let me make it such by giving back to my dear cousin the home that is her own by right, and of which she has been deprived too long. Maidie dear, the old château is yours;" and he laid a great bundle of papers in her hand, which seemed to me more like a doomsday-book, so full of awful words were they, than like the return of my darling's fortunes. My Lady uttered a cry, and Monsieur Lucien grasped Philippe by the shoulder.

"What have you done, Philippe?" they both cried at once.

"Nothing but my sweetest duty," he answered, with a laugh which showed there was no regret whatever lurking in his unselfish heart. "And now that I am your guest, and you my hosts," he said, "I shall deem it ill

hospitality if you dispute my word, and I shall be constrained to build me a new château where the Dépendance now stands, if I may not live in peace with you."

"Ah, no, Philippe," cried my Lady, dropping all the dreadful papers and coming close to him, "you shall never leave us, shall he, dearest?" and she looked to her lover to confirm her words. "Never, never, and you must leave the old home as it stands, the dear old house where we have all been happy. Promise me that, Philippe; you can refuse me nothing to-day?" and Philippe promised.

Then, as she stood there amongst those who loved her so well, — for Madame was also come to welcome her, — she, having in mind her cousin Philippe's generous act, pointed to the high chimney which bore the bright heraldry of Saint-Rambert, and the golden letters that she loved, and which seemed all the brighter to-day for the joy that was in her heart, and turning to her lover she said, —

"It is the truth, Lucien, is it not? 'Love conquers all things.'"

"Ah, yes, my own, it is the most blessed

of all truths, and we shall abide by it forever!" and he drew her head to him so that it rested on his breast.

Now, not very long after the happening of all these exciting events, my darling appeared before me one morning with something on her slender finger, — a precious thing indeed, a circlet of yellow gold with tiny sparkling jewels inlaid to shape certain letters. All her playful winsome ways were come back to her now that she was happy, and at first she made as if she would not show it me, holding her hand behind her back, and then holding it out again kitten-like, and saying,—

"You must not read the words upon it, mistress mine."

"Fie, fie, upon you, little elf!" I cried, "will you not let your old nurse be happy with you?" and the very next instant she was hanging on my neck, kissing and coddling me as she used to do when she was little, and had been a bit naughty.

I took the precious hand in mine, and turned the fair gem upon it round and round till I had read the words AMOR VINCIT OMNIA!

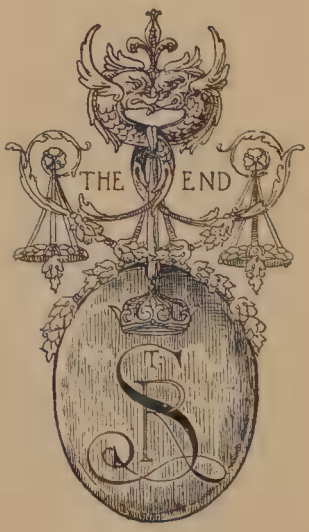
"A circlet of yellow gold on her slender finger."

And now, what more can I tell you, having come to the very end of my story, save that my darling is happy and that we are all so with her, and that, as she would go nowhere but to England for my sake on her wedding-journey, and would take no one to attend her but myself, I have lately seen my dear David and his family of little Davids, sturdy and bonnie as himself, who opened their mouths and eyes very wide at sight of me, for being so very fine, and having seen so much of the world; and that, returning thence in safety, we are all living in peace and quiet, as all sensible folk should do, together at the great château; and that the wars being ended by the great Emperor's downfall, Monsieur Lucien has turned his thoughts to other things of no less worth.

And you may see for yourself, any day you chance to happen in our fair land of Provence, the old château as it stands to-day, tall and strong and stately, while all the glowing autumn landscape lies blushing at its feet; there it will stand for many years to come, when we shall be no more, and others look upon it to remember my young master's

good deed, of which it is a symbol; for a good deed lives on to make even the dead blessed.

As for my dear young Marquis, my brave Philippe, the worthiest young nobleman of his noble name, he has not yet found the woman to take my darling's place in his heart, although it is some years now, as I write, since all these things have happened. Indeed, I doubt much if there be anywhere else in the world a woman quite good enough for him; but if he ever does find her, as I hope he may, for his own happiness, I will surely tell you of it on another page.



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